

Yang Bo

*Take me to the river*

January 13 (Tue) – February 21 (Sat), 2026

Yutaka Kikutake Gallery Roppongi is pleased to present a solo exhibition by painter Yang Bo from Tuesday, January 13th to Saturday, February 21st, 2026. Yang Bo was born in Hubei, China in 1991, and moved with his family to Miyagi Prefecture, Japan in 2001. He currently lives and works in Tokyo. Yang Bo's paintings, which have consistently focused on the theme of pop culture, as exemplified by film and music, and the sense of distance involved in its reception, are characterized by compositions consisting of lyrics by pop stars from the 1960s and 1970s set against everyday scenes such as roadsides, riverbanks, and interiors. Such works, rooted in the artist's personal formative experiences, present a highly critical perspective on crowd psychology and consumer society. This exhibition introduces approximately 10 new works centered around the motifs of "rivers," which the artist has explored since early in his career, "airplanes," which has been his subject of interest in recent years, and "plants," which are deeply integrated into his daily life.

The series of five paintings depicting airplanes feature lyrics from songs about rivers. From a tributary of the Yangtze River that flows through his hometown of Hubei, to the Sakai River in the Sagami-hara region of Kanagawa Prefecture where he once lived, and the Kanda River near his current residence—these rivers frequently depicted in his work evoke separation or suggest circularity, at times serving as ambiguous subjects countering the symbolic, and are entities rich in meaning that have also influenced Yang's identity. Finding affinity in recent years between his theme of distance and airports as liminal spaces, as well as airplanes that embody the concept of departure, Yang explores the depth of his expression by overlaying such imagery with the motif of rivers which has long been recurring in his work. This series, based on complementary color relationships, employs colors that are furthest apart on the color wheel with their brightness adjusted where necessary, suggesting the artist's attempt to maintain an ambiguous, gray-tinged realm. Furthermore, the selection of colors using the color solid system following the color wheel, reveals an attitude that strives to eliminate as much as possible the symbolism evoked by color. Where is the airplane flying? The relationship between the lyrics evoking a river and the airplane depicted in the center of the painting is left to the viewer's imagination.

Yang, who lives surrounded by plants, produced two works on canvas for this exhibition inspired by everyday scenes that caught his eye. In the first, the space formed by the lines of leaves and branches is painted over with black, within which the word "believe" appears afloat. The second work, painted in a nearly identical

composition but in brighter hues, features the words “totally believe.” What meaning does the word “believe,” adrift within these cave-like spaces reminiscent of a rabbit hole leading to some other dimension, hold in the post-truth era in which we live? The critical perspective cast upon a world where signification and symbolism, strident claims, and conspiratorial facile hopes are consumed one after another resonates with the sense of unease that the paintings exude. Yang also cites influences from William Blake’s use of color and the compositions of Symbolist painter Arnold Böcklin.

The exhibition’s title, “Take me to the river,” is taken from the lyrics of a song by Al Green, in which the feelings of a singer drowning in love evoke various associations such as baptism and purification. Only God knows whether the river he arrives at will purify him or will make him drown deeper. Yang’s paintings, while pop in style, are characterized by a multi-layered structure that incorporates critical themes of identity, history, and contemporary society. In particular, “sense of distance,” which has consistently defined Yang’s artistic practice, as highlighted in this exhibition, has served as a central theme underlying his entire oeuvre. Yang’s practice, built through persistent questioning and repeated creation, harbors the power to provoke profound questions and evoke resonance in us living in today’s increasingly chaotic world.