

WORKPLACE

Ex Libris

Olivia Jia

12 May - 17 June

Opening Reception

Thursday 12 May, 6 - 8pm

Workplace

40 Margaret Street

W1G 0JH London



Olivia Jia *Untitled (Audubon owls, a walk at midnight)*, 2022.

Workplace is delighted to present the first solo exhibition of Philadelphia based artist Olivia Jia at its 40 Margaret Street space. The exhibition will include a series of new small-scale paintings in which she brings together an array of images and objects sourced from her own archive onto the pages of fictional manuscripts, creating personal and poetic narratives.

Inspired in part by 19th century American still-life and trompe l'oeil painting, early and pre-Renaissance European paintings of books, and Surrealism; Jia's meticulously painted, unconventional still-lives depict manuscripts and archival spaces as containers of personal narratives and history. The images presented on these pages stem from the artist's extensive and ongoing personal archive of photographs, ephemera, and objects. A photograph of Jia's great-uncle's star-spangled tunic is placed next to a clay pot from an internet search, found while pining for a lost heirloom; a bunch of flower market lilies is painted while thinking of 19th century botanical illustration; the moon from the artist's childhood bedroom window is juxtaposed with a jade comb carved with a crane.

By decontextualizing and juxtaposing images of disparate origin, Jia investigates the metaphorical and narrative potential that lingers between them. Within the painted space of the book, formal relationships become loaded with narrative potential and poetic resonance, reinforced by a colour palette referencing darkly lit archival spaces, museum period rooms, nocturnes, and dream spaces. Rather than literal still-lives, Jia's paintings utilise the structure of the book to depict psychological space—the mind as an idiosyncratic place of knowledge creation, where the self is made by the stories that surround us. Though depicting ephemera and books of various design, scale, and condition, her paintings are essentially pages from the same book, the whole of her practice.

Jia's fascination with historical and personal narratives stems from her own experiences. The child of Chinese immigrants to the United States, the artist's understanding of any singular canonical history is complicated by her experience of diaspora. For her, history is a mutable and fraught thing that can be destroyed and made anew, exploited or vindicated, mysterious and impenetrable. Her fascination with artefacts, art history, and ephemera is particularly driven by the destruction of many such items in her own family history during periods of socio-political upheaval; for Jia, the void of these items and the history that they represent is an opportunity to self-define and introspect.

Olivia Jia (b. 1994, Chicago, IL) is a Philadelphia-based painter. She received a BFA from the University of the Arts in 2017. Honors include the Ellen Battell Stoeckel Fellowship to attend the Yale Norfolk Summer School of Art in 2015 and the President's Award at the University of the Arts. She has exhibited at venues including Dongsomun in Seoul, South Korea and Marginal Utility, New Boone, and Space 1026 in Philadelphia, PA.

Workplace is a contemporary art gallery, based in London, UK.

Workplace Gallery was founded in Gateshead in 2005 by Miles Thurlow and Paul Moss, with a second space in London between 2013-18. In 2020, following a hiatus due to the illness and passing of co-founder Paul Moss, the gallery was relaunched with a new team directed by Thurlow and relocated to London's West End with the aim of reaching new audiences and fostering dialogues between international and British artists working outside of the capital.

Before moving to London, the gallery set up a charitable foundation in Newcastle to leave a legacy in the North East of England. Committed to ideals of diversity, environmental sustainability and community, the ethos of the Foundation runs through the gallery, with a continued wish to represent the work of artists whose practices reflect the multiplicity of voices that constitute our society today. Workplace continues to promote, engage and champion artists working across media and at different career stages, through a program of exhibitions, events and art fair participation.

For all press inquiries please contact: press@workplace.art

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