



In The Shells, 2019 - 2025
Paper, reed, UV coating
Variable sizes

Xiaojing Yan

yanxiaojing.com

Born: Jiangsu, China, 1978
Lives/Works: Toronto, Ontario, Canada



EDUCATION

- 2007 M.F.A. Sculpture, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, PA, USA
- 2004 Certificate Jewelry Essentials, George Brown College, Toronto, Ontario, Canada
- 2000 B.F.A. Decorative Art, Nanjing University of the Arts, Jiangsu, China

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

- 2025 *After Completion*, Lakeville Contemporary Art Space, Shanghai, China; *Under the Pines, Over the Clouds*, University of Waterloo Art Gallery, Waterloo, ON, Canada
- 2023 *Spirit Cloud*, Islamic Arts Festival 25th edition "Manifestations," Sharjah Art Museum, UAE; *Symbiosis*, Art Gallery of Great Victoria, Victoria, BC, Canada; *BioCurious*, Art Windor Essex, Windsor, ON, Canada; *Worried Earth: Eco-Anxiety and Entangled Grief*, Anna Leonowens Gallery, NSCAD, Halifax, NS, Canada
- 2022 *The Art of Living on Community, Immigration, and the Migration of Symbols*, Canadian Culture Centre, Paris, France; *The Language of Mushrooms: The Interspecies Internet*, CGK Contemporary Gallery Kunming, Yunan, China; *Worried Earth: Eco-Anxiety and Entangled Grief*, Gallery 1C03, The University of Winnipeg, MB, Canada; *Future Perfect/Imperfect: The Next Century*, Silvermine Galleries, New Canaan, CT, USA

SELECTED HONORS, AWARDS AND RESIDENCIES

- 2024 Research and Creation Grant, Canada Council for the Arts
- 2023 Research and Creation Grant, Canada Council for the Arts
- 2021 InStyle Women InCreation Prize in Visual Arts, Canada; Research and Creation Grant, Canada Council for the Arts, Canada; Arts Response Initiative, Ontario Arts Council, Canada; Skills and Career Development, Ontario Arts Council, Canada; Annual Conference Support Grant, College of Art Association, New York, NY, USA

SELECTED PUBLIC ART AND COMMISSIONS

- 2025 *The Underground Sun*, Site-specific, plant-based land art installation, Milliken Mills Park, Markham, ON, Canada
- 2025 *Contours of Connection*, William G. Davis Memorial Complex, with Lilly Otasevic, Brampton, ON, Canada
- 2025 *Ephemeral Reverie*, Skyway Community Centre Public Art Commission, Burlington, ON, Canada
- 2021 *Emergence*, Hermès, Shanghai, China
- 2019 *Cloudscape*, Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, ON, Canada; *Into the Dreams*, Hermès Maison, Shanghai, China

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

- 2018 *Auspicious Omens*, exhibition catalogue, Suzhou Museum, China

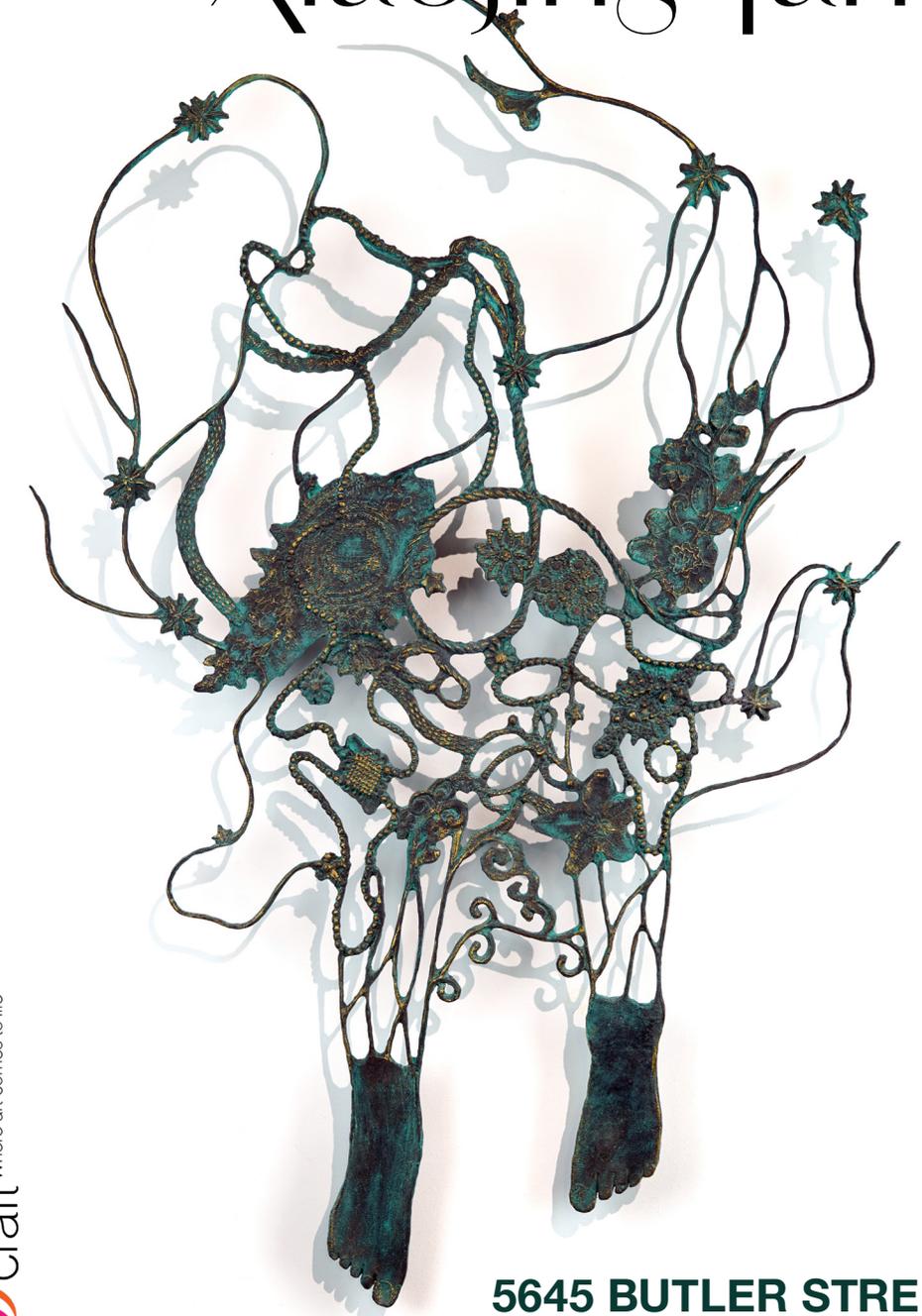
This biographical material is selectively compiled and not meant to be exhaustive.

Cover Image
Marking (4 of 4), 2016
Cast bronze
33.5 x 22 x 1 in

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Peregrination: 阎晓静 Xiaojing Yan



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2.6 - 5.2.2026

Peregrination: Xiaojing Yan

2026 Tomayko Solo Artist Elevation Series

Peregrination, a long and meandering journey...

Xiaojing Yan explores migration, cultural hybridity, and the connection between identity and nature. Born in China and now based in Toronto, she draws from ancient Chinese folklore and rituals, reinterpreting them through a contemporary lens. Her work transforms traditional narrative into personal symbols, weaving together heritage, memory, and her own ideation of nature. Natural motifs serve as metaphors for movement and transformation, reflecting the fluid passage between cultures and histories. Yan's work becomes a meditation on belonging, creating a landscape uniquely her own. In this act of peregrination, she invites viewers to reflect on the universal and spiritual search within an ever-shifting cultural world.

THANK YOU

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Material Recovery in the Work of Xiaojing Yan

HERB TAM

The *Huang Di Nei Jing*, the Inner Canon of the Yellow Emperor, is more than a 2,000-year-old medical text. Written as a dialogue between the Yellow Emperor and Qi Bo, his physician, the *Nei Jing* is a philosophical blueprint encoded with Chinese metaphysics. It maps a world where the human body, the natural landscape, and cosmic energy are woven together through concepts like Qi, Yin Yang, and the Five Elements¹. Chinese medicine is a complete worldview, one that uses the body to describe the world, and the world to describe the body.

We can see this worldview encapsulated in the body of Yan's work. Her art isn't a direct illustration of these concepts, but rather operates by the same principles. She works with materials for their symbolic weight, letting them transform to create a language of the landscape that is mediated through this ancient, embodied logic.

Take *Lingzhi Girl* (2020)². A bust of a young girl, initially made of woodchips, is conceived as a work in perpetual progress. It is a host and a set of conditions, more than it is a static sculptural object. Yan introduces mycelium, a fungal structure which grows and eventually consumes the form, becoming a fragile, ghostly version of the girl. Placed in a greenhouse, *lingzhi* mushrooms—a classic symbol of longevity in Chinese art—sprout

SETS A PROCESS IN MOTION AND THEN GIVES OVER CONTROL BACK TO NATURE...

from this new body. Yan isn't a sculptor in the traditional sense; she is a caretaker. She sets a process in motion and then gives over control back to nature, allowing the form to be overtaken by the very life it represents.

This tension—between control and co-becoming, the individual and the natural order—animates Yan's work. And this tension has a history, one shaped by migration. The global presence of Chinese medicine is itself a product of

disruption. In the 19th century, the Opium Wars, fueled by the British import of opium, shattered the Chinese countryside and contributed to a mass exodus. Chinese migrants, heading for gold rushes and railroad projects, carried their medical traditions with them. In new places like the American West, practitioners adapted, finding local substitutes for traditional ingredients. This cultural knowledge was a resilient, evolving practice, one of the first Chinese cultural exports to enter the mainstream American consciousness. Chinese doctors in frontier towns were often the most trusted medical practitioners in an era when Western medicine was just developing.

Yan's investigations, rooted in Chinese materiality for over twenty years, may be seen through this diasporic lens. Born in China and now based in Canada, her work asks questions of the individual person to the materials themselves. She suggests that the subjectivity lies, not in the solitary self³, but in nature—the forces of growth, transformation, and symbolism.

We see this in *Spirit Cloud* (2016–17), where she constructs ethereal, shifting clouds from strands of pearls. The material itself holds a contradiction. A pearl is the result of a

Cloud Cell (Miniature), 2014
Freshwater pearls, filament, aluminum
22.5 x 10.6 x 10.6 in

biological defense, a protective coating against an intruder. What the oyster defines as a threat, we celebrate as luxurious beauty. In Yan's hands, these individual objects of defense become a collective, a cloud, and a system in constant, shimmering transformation. The work embodies a core idea: that meaning is not fixed, but is formed through process, context, and a constant state of becoming.

In Chinatowns across the world, Chinese medicine counters or herbal shops served the health care needs

of the local community in their native tongues and traditions. They were part of an informal system of care that included funeral rites and sometimes the repatriation of remains. Back when families were scarce in these male-dominated neighborhoods, someone's death might set off a collective process of returning their bones to a final resting place in the ancestral homeland. In many Chinese villages, burial grounds were placed according to feng shui principles that incorporated an interconnected understanding of the land and the stars.

A new work, *Configuring the Infinite* (2025) points towards cycles of life and death in the cosmos. The work is made of lava stone beads suspended on gilded/golden threads arranged in hexagonal net-like forms. They imagine various explosions across space-time that can be thought of as genesis points: from volcanic eruptions to dying stars that generate new worlds. Xiaojing Yan's work allows us to return to expanded ideas of landscape through the alchemy of Chinese medicine doctrines, material poetics, and a vast gaze towards ancient time that is held in the vapors of becoming.

¹ The *Neijing Tu*, a depiction of the human body's internal systems as a vertical landscape, captures the poetry of this interconnectedness.

² *Lingzhi Girl* is a series of sculptural busts Yan created between 2016 and 2024. There are 22 works in the series.

³ Individualism and the power of human rationality was upheld by Western philosophers like Immanuel Kant, placing human consciousness at the top of a cosmic order.

ABOUT THE ESSAYIST

Herb Tam is the Chief Curator and Senior Director of Exhibitions and Programs at the Museum of Chinese in America, New York. He was previously a curator of the alternative space Exit Art and at the Queens Museum. Herb is a co-founder of the Chinatown Basketball Club.



Lingzhi Girl, 2018
Cast bronze
14 x 15 x 12 in