

INTRODUCTION

Ola Wlusek

Part I: A Matter of Light and Dark Matter

*Art does not reproduce the visible,
it makes visible.*

– Paul Klee, *Creative Confession* (1920)

Recent years have seen an influx of trending articles on various social media outlets about the most current observations made regarding dark matter; the invisible goo which according to scientists holds the universe, and everything, together. Dark matter cannot be seen, not even with the aid of the most advanced technology, as it does not reflect light. If there are any speculations regarding its behaviour and construct, they are made merely on the basis of observations about the interactions of other objects with this elusive material.

Propelled by curiosity and a shared fascination, the race of the public and researchers alike to observe and pin down this unobservable substance has contributed to the rise of questions regarding our origin as a species, as reproductive entities, and even as a very idea.

When considering Jinny Yu's oeuvre, it is almost impossible to comprehend the beginning of her aluminum series and installation works, as they are suspended in some sort of cosmic vacuous place within the discourse surrounding abstraction and representation. Where did they come from? What are they referencing? To understand Yu's work is to know about her method as a creator of in-situ experiments, as a cross-genre collaborator, and as a perpetrator of happy accidents in her Ottawa studio. It is in the way Yu moves across disciplines and is tuned in to the immediate environment in which she creates that allow her intentions to be visible to the viewer.

The breakthrough in her approach to the medium of paint, and the act of painting, is evident in her aluminum works, where bent surfaces refract light and black paint creates illusionary three-dimensional portholes. The sharp outlines of the angular pieces of the shiny material blend in with

the architectural support of the spaces in which they are installed, as if emerging from the gallery walls themselves. Yu's paintings on aluminum effortlessly exist in space, as if she whimsically called them into being in some sort of a mystical spell. The black paint that she often uses acts as a border, directing and sometimes restricting the viewer's gaze. It also allows this gaze to be lost in a liminal space that alludes to a black hole, and causes the viewer to question whether this portal is concave or convex inside the bent aluminum frame. Where does the passage lead?

Yu's practice opens a universe of potentiality for the viewer by merging what is real with what could be. By colliding the mechanisms of abstraction and representation, she situates us on the threshold between what is abstract and what is actually there: black sprayed on the wall becomes smoke from a factory stack; a wall painted red and a plastic blue tear drop carry the nationalistic politics of two countries divided by an ocean; a cut-out fragment of wall plaster unveils the history of a particular space; and a video documenting the passage of time through light hitting a piece of aluminum to composed piano music is actually a formal painting. Yu makes the familiar universe visible while pointing out what often escapes unseen.

Part II: About the Creators

Because something from the world is reflected in those surfaces.

– Penny Cousineau-Levine, from interview with the artist

This monograph contains a wonderful and insightful essay by the distinguished Mark A. Cheetham, Professor in the Department of the History of Art at the University of Toronto that contextualizes Yu's practice within the current climate of contemporary abstract painting. His essay sheds light onto Yu's practice between 2008 and 2013, to pursue the artist's exploration of the monochrome and space. The monograph also includes an interview with the artist conducted by Penny Cousineau-Levine, Professor of the History and Theory of Art and founder of the MFA program at the University of Ottawa, where Yu is currently an Associate Professor of Painting in the Department of Visual Arts. This interview gives us a privileged chance to learn more about the overall very private Jinny Yu, including her background, current belief system, extensive travels, and numerous places she has called home over the last ten years.



Tear Drop, 2013, plastic sheet and aluminum, 81 x 46 x 13 cm

The sensitive and attuned observations of these contributors, including their poignant reflections into the artistic career and trajectory of Yu's thoughts and actions, would not have been brought together without the support of Éditions Art Mûr, who took on the publication of this monograph. The Ottawa Art Gallery is pleased to partner on this initiative in support of this important artist, who has called Ottawa home for the last eight years. It is integral for the growth and well being of the cultural community to support artists like Yu, who are dedicated to their artistic practices, to fostering the talents of others, and to the very act of creation itself. Thanks to the support of our generous core funders including the Canada Council for the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council and the City of Ottawa, we are able to support significant initiatives like this book project. On behalf of the Ottawa Art Gallery, I would also like to thank the artist for her openness in allowing us to observe her practice and psyche beyond the black, urging us to peer beneath the surfaces that carry the paint, and remain open to the different possibilities of where light may travel.