

Arteviste.

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An Interview with British painter Faye Wei Wei in her South London studio.



Portrait by Flora Alexandra Ogilvy

A studio visit with Faye in South London is a transcendent experience. The painter glided around her space, making herbal tea in the Japanese tea set she'd just brought from Tokyo. It felt like entering a Parisian salon with kimonos draped over a piano, and her unique collection of seashells and old postcards scattered everywhere. Quite simply, it was like walking in a dream.

Faye graduated from Slade School of Fine Art last year and has since been creating her large-scale, somewhat hallucinogenic works in London. Their size is often on a human scale, bringing you closer to the characters within. Entwined with mythology and romance, her symbolic paintings have been written about in *Dazed*, *G-IRL* and *Another* magazine.

Each piece is dreamier in the next. Given the empowering rush of femininity that pulses through each canvas, it's unsurprising they've garnered so much attention of late. From sea urchins to horses and sculptures, Faye reflects Picasso in her ability to collect motifs - having just seen his work in the Gagosian exhibition, I found myself drawing parallels.

You'll find Faye's work in the group exhibition *The Belly and the Members* curated by Antonia Marsh at Cob Gallery, Camden from 6th September. Our Soho House talk with Faye will be held at Shoreditch House on Wednesday 15th November for members and their guests.

Was there a pivotal moment when you decided to be an artist?

I was alone in the art studios in the basement at school— the studios were open late on Tuesday's and I devoured every moment. I remember placing many sheets of creamy off-white paper all over the floor and I did a kind of dance with black ink all over my feet. Very concentrated, very intensely I danced. I then went back in with the brush and worked into the painting figuring out the importance of mark-making and the furious, but enchanting concentration needed to make a powerful image. After, I remember feeling very pleased with myself and I rewarded myself by heating up a jam doughnut on the hot etching plates.

Can you tell us about the process of making your work?

I usually start with a feeling, line of poetry or an image that will stick to my mind and not let go for days. I try and get into a state of total commitment and concentration. I'll draw a lot and sit and think for a long, long time. I think I have to be feeling quite brave that day. It takes a lot of nerve to make a mark that is convincing. Something the beautiful Nicole Wittenberg taught me in New York was how to hold a brush loaded with paint, how to push it with conviction and power on the surface of the canvas, to let it ebb and flow with the emotional logic of the form you are presenting and to never lose your nerve half way.

Nicole is the most wonderful human and would paint by my side and let me watch and absorb all her wisdom. We would spend afternoons just drawing lips together, or drawing the sparkle of someone's eye she'd show me how to make them wink right back at you. The process of painting is always a lovely surprise, it's always that beautiful, pleasurable moment where you step back and see what you've made and it's quite an amazing feeling of wonder. I feel as if I'm dancing with something that beats and breathes, working to form a seductive image.

How would you define beauty in 140 characters or less?

Like the hyacinth in the mountains that shepherd men/ with their feet trample down on the ground/ the purple flower

What piece of your artwork would you like to be remembered for?

I'm very sure I haven't made it yet. I'd want to be remembered for my best painting ever, that I will probably make when I am very old and much more wise and my hands are much stronger and my eye can see even more. Maybe then, I would make something good.

Do you collect anything? Your South London studio is full of treasures.

I am very very spoilt and lucky to have spent some time in Japan. I went just this summer for a month and came back with the most

delicate beautiful glass and ceramic sake cups that I bought from all over Japan. My very sweet friends Ura and Leo took me to their amazing high tech wonderland art school, Musashino in Tokyo, on our walk back to the station we passed by my dream shop. It was filled with desire. I bought back some very delicate objects—two feathered birds encased within a glass cage and a beautiful lady adorned with a kimono staring at herself in the mirror, also encased within a glass cage.

Is there a favourite photograph or painting, which inspires you?

I am so inspired by my creative genius friends that I am so lucky to have. I adore and treasure the artworks they gift to me (sometimes if I'm good n' lucky). My friend Oli Pearce is the most amazing painter, he drew a portrait of me on the back of a receipt and it's the crown jewel of my messy



Artwork by Faye Wei Wei

castle. Oli has such a sweet sensitive eye, he has a very different gesture to me and can create such emotional faces with such a presence and solidity that I could only dream of doing, I'm very jealous.

Which artist of the past would you most like to meet?

Cy Twombly.

How does your Chinese heritage impact your work?

I want to be a strong female WoC painter. My heritage drives me to work hard and make a career for myself in order to make my immigrant parents who have worked so hard their whole lives to provide me and my siblings with education and love in this strange hostile world. I want to carry on making them proud of me.

What is your greatest indulgence in life?

Going to Tsukiji market in Tokyo early in the morning and eating sea urchins, which I scoop into my mouth and onto my tongue with only my hands.

If you could work within a past art movement, which would it be?

I'd like to go back to 1439 and assist Fra Angelico in painting the frescos for San Marco in Florence. His paintings are so moving to me, they have this reflective, atemporal, other-worldly quality that I've never seen before. The colours are milky and translucent like a kind of moonstone or a young opal cracked and healed. I adore frescos, the wet-on-wet painting onto plaster gives paint such a glow and presence. I would have sat obediently mixing his paints and crushing up quartz to add to Fra Angelico's paintings. He did this to evoke holy light. I also love Francesco Clemente's frescos—so maybe after hanging out with Fra Angelico I'd also like to hang out in 1980's New York.

What materials are involved in your practice? Do you use anything unusual?

A lot of goo, that's the secret.

Has social media had a positive impact on your career?

I suppose so?

What do you wish every child were taught?

If I were to dreamily answer this question I would say that every child should be taught poetry and painting. Yes, in a perfect world, but there is the deeply sad reality that around 65 million girls globally will never attend school. I am so so grateful to my parents for giving me the gift of education and everyday I realise how lucky I am. I wish to empower those girls and give them all the opportunities I had as a little girl.

What is your favourite art gallery in London and why?

The Wallace Collection, because of the Rembrandt.



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I've been wearing the same faded red corduroy smock to paint in for 5 years now, the right hand side of the torso part is covered in a very thick, hardened layer of oil paint as I wipe off the excess paint onto my own body without realising. A lot of the time I find you have to wipe your loaded brush to lessen the intensity of the oil in order to create the right weight and speed of the line you desire to make.

What advice would you give a young artist following in your steps?

'You gotta stay fed! Eat well!'

My sweet, gorgeous, talented, painter friend Omari Douglin said that to me when I was leaving my beloved New York. He did so as he handed me a pack of Swedish Fish for the plane journey.

Do you love what you do? Why?

There's nothing like the feeling of making something. It is the highest form of romance.

Written by Flora Alexandra Ogilvy, founder of Arteviste.

Do you prefer to work within a community or independently?

Both, I need the community of the art world and all my talented friends to survive and stay inspired. I chose painting because I really like being able to do every part of the process on my own from start to finish. I don't like having to rely on other people. I love having my own studio, but at the same time if I couldn't show anyone the paintings, I would wither.

Do you often make and receive studio visits? Are they important?

I love studio visits, a little cup of sake or a cup of jasmine tea with long, lulling and stimulating conversations that last for hours and hours—heavenly.

Do you have a routine or do you follow any rituals when you are painting?