



# Faye Wei Wei

Lives and works in London, UK  
Born 1994





Lady, Three White Leopards Sat Under a Juniper Tree, 2017, Oil on canvas, 1830x1370mm



Adam and Eve under flowers, Oil bar and charcoal on paper, 420x300mm



How long have you been painting? When did it become serious?

My family would take me to Hong Kong every summer growing up, it's so different to south London--a real maze of a place. The landscape there is so beautiful, giant soaring mountains that wear clouds as hats battling for attention with sky scrapers built by bamboo scaffolding. I would sit on our balcony on the 28th floor and spend hours drawing every tiny little window of every apartment block and every leaf on the mountains. I have always felt really satisfied by creating an image, stealing a part of the world I see before me and swallowing it into a drawing. God I miss Hong Kong, the monsoon season would transform the sky into a wet, ocean, heaving, the soul stretched tight across the sky.

I suppose I've always felt it was very serious, to paint is to love again, as it were. I was really lucky in high school, my teachers really encouraged me to paint with oil, I felt so excited and liberated, I made huge paintings on paper from looking at the small crevices between shells and bones. I was interested in the word Lacuna, as in a pause in a piece of music or the gaps between bones or like a heavy pause between the richest words in poetry. It's always about the feeling of painting for me, I get totally obsessed and lost in it, it's so seductive to me, this struggle between your brush, your hand, your mind, the image in your mind and how it throws itself onto the skin of the canvas, when you can get all these things right, very rarely, it feels like nothing else in the world.

How was your experience of studying at Slade School of Fine Arts in London? Would you recommend it?

The Slade is a wonderful enriching place, I really miss it. I fell in love so many times there, which makes you grow up fast. I did all my growing up there. I learnt a lot from the amazing tutors, but also they have a huge emphasis on studio culture there. Really you learn from interacting every day with your mates, drinking wine, arguing about painting, stumbling around Soho, the Slade is a lot of fun. It's also really tough though, but that's great, they really teach you to think on your own there, you come out stronger for sure.

You're very young and you're already represented by COB Gallery, how is it to work with them?

I feel so lucky to have them. I met Cassie outside a party once, I lit her cigarette for her, the rest is history I guess. Cob is my home, it's run by really strong women and I really admire them, it's nice to feel I have a community there as I'm starting out--makes me feel a little less lost and more able to choose to focus on projects and commissions that I really care about.

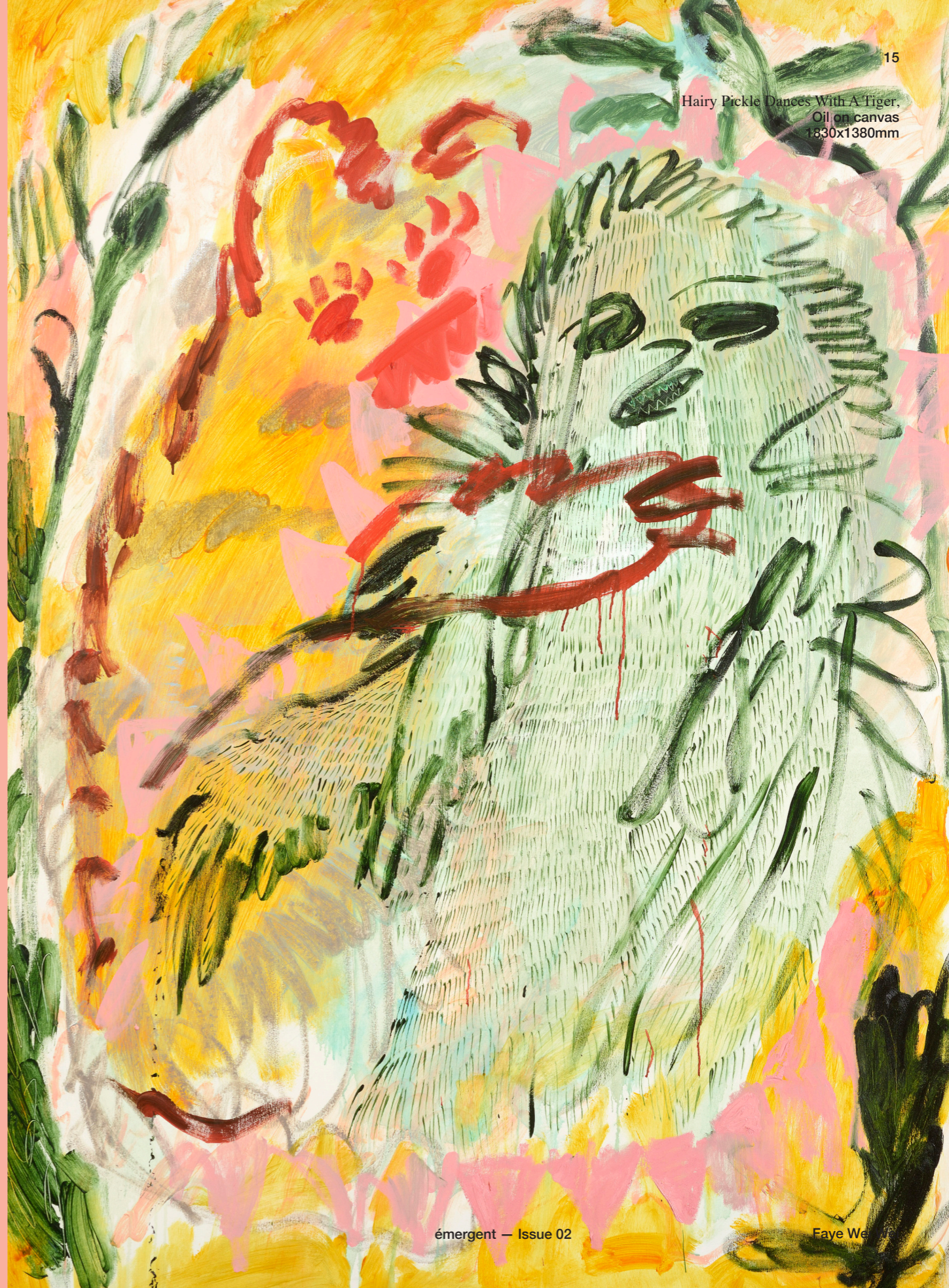
Your paintings bring us to a world of imagination and fantasy. Looks like they're almost narrating a myth. Is there a meaning or story behind every single one of your paintings?

I suppose I see them as a sort of personal myth making of myself or of this "world" I have built around me. There is often a feeling of a frozen narrative, but I never really set out to illustrate a specific story or myth, it's more organic and more about the process of image making. They often start with a line of poetry that gets stuck in my head, for example, 'At night she saw flowers of velvet with black hearts and gold eyes' I began at the left hand top corner of this giant dominating canvas, so intimidating, but so infinite in possibility like looking into a void. I pinned down the world in that black flower, the golden green eyes that are leaves, and out from there poured a whole velvet painted world that became the body of work I named after the mouth of the sea urchin, 'Aristotle's Lantern'. The meanings and stories reveal themselves to me afterwards. It's not important to know exactly what I read into them, in fact I would probably hate it because they're so revealing of quite dark secrets and painful things of the heart I suppose, but I won't ever tell you.

Horses, Snakes, Flowers, Stars, ... Tell us a bit about this world that seems so unique to you.

There are just certain things that feel good to me to paint, that hang the paint well, and hang the emotions well too. I guess the recurring symbolism is a way to amalgamate the images and they're wonderful tools to build compositions. The symbols often occur in dualities, I'm fascinated by pairs, that du-

Hairy Pickle Dances With A Tiger,  
Oil on canvas  
1830x1380mm





Boy With Snake, 2016  
Oil on canvas  
1830x1370mm





Anemones and Lovers, 2017  
Oil on canvas  
1830 x 1370 mm



ality of male and female, left hand weakness, right hand strength, two ears, two shells--like severed ears, two tulips leaning in a dance--in a kiss, the two pronged tongue of a curled up snake, two eyes that make a face, two chambers in your heart, two orbs--sun and moon, Plato splitting an egg in half with a hair, splitting lovers in half across the world when we used to be attached by our belly buttons.

Do you consider yourself an introverted or extroverted person?

I'm very extroverted I think... I get very lonely on my own all the time, I really get my energy from being around the people I love, meeting new exciting creative people,

I've had to learn to be good at being alone, it's so exhausting for me though.

Are there any artists that have been significant in your progression as a painter?

Nicole Wittenberg taught me a lot about the integrity of painting, how to be soft and bold and strong, how to be a woman in the art world. When I moved to New York to study for a semester, I felt so isolated, I would walk around the East Village crying to my sister on the phone telling her to take me home... I was such a baby! Nicole was so kind, she introduced me to so many amazing artists and we'd all hang out at her studio in Chinatown, drinking Fernet-Branca and Campari sodas talking to her little blue bird,



going out and dancing close to people. But I suppose painting full time now and having to have a very strong work ethic has meant that I have to be quite reclusive, I can't have any distractions when I'm painting, I think it just doesn't work if you're feeling lazy about it, you can't be half hearted about it. I feel like I have to get into a flow of total commitment and concentration in my mind otherwise you can tell, the mark making is so sensitive to your emotions and your state of mind that I can really tell when I was being lazy, and that's just no good to me, you're left with no magic, no seduction and that's no good. So

Roy. She's an amazing painter, love her to bits, love you Nicole.

Do you leave your work open to interpretation? Or do you think the viewer should engage with your work in a specific way?

I'd like their eyes to wander and wonder.

Do you ever feel the need to remove yourself from your paintings? Do you find there is any anxiety in creating your work?

I don't think I could remove myself from my paintings, I give it my all when I'm working and am totally obsessed with it. I guess I feel





Young Eros, Double Day, 2017, Oil on canvas, 610x460mm



Boxers, 2017, Oil on canvas, 1380x1120mm







He Donned His Trousers of Striped Grass, 2017  
Oil on canvas  
1520x1220mm







really strongly bound to it, intertwined with it. Painting is an expression, it's like an embrace, it's erotic, it's imprinting onto something that reacts and is alive, it's very human and very sensitive, it's just an extension of myself I suppose, a sort of body. I constantly feel insecure, about my work self critical, really terrified of painting too, it's just the most difficult thing in the world and I love it so much of course, but I am so young I can't claim to know anything about it really, but I'm trying. Everyone struggles with work, if it were easy then it would be too boring and I would probably give up and become a cook.

What things outside of the creative sphere interest you?

I am a really great eater, I have a curious tongue that wants to taste everything. My mother is the most incredible cook, I am incredibly lucky to have traditional Cantonese food every day, healthy gorgeous steaming glorious Chinese food! I really think there is a parallel between eating and taste and that heightened sense of seduction, and the seduction and emotion and richness of painting. The two experiences swallow me up. I adore eating sea urchins, that five pointed star. The sea urchin revolves around the rule

and pattern of the number five, their are five chambers in an urchins heart, five lovers lay their memories there, five mouths to kiss before sleep.

Are there any female contemporary artists whose work really inspires or excites you?

I just saw a screening of Martine Syms' incredible film 'Incense Sweaters and Ice' recently at the ICA. She's amazing, there's these almost dream scape moments that really pierced me, it made me really think about the performative nature of femininity and specifically black femininity. I also feel really inspired by Tschabalala Self, I saw some of her paintings in New York last summer, they are so inspiring, beautiful, sewn together images that really linger in your mind. I've also been thinking about Kara Walker's 'A Subtlety or the Marvelous Sugar Baby' a huge landscape engulfing sculpture made of sugar, of a dominating sexualised caricature of the black female form, these female artists are making really important work that is questioning gender and race and I really admire them.





The Effect of Moon Baths Was Unknown, 2017, Oil on linen, 2500x2000mm



Two Pearls on an Ebony Table, 2017, Oil on canvas, 1070x910mm





Tossing Egg Yolk Sun, 2017, Oil on canvas, 1070x910mm

“Painting is an expression, it’s like an embrace, it’s erotic”





Adonis and His Snake, 2017, Oil on canvas, 460x610mm



Double Day, 2017, Oil on canvas, 1830x1370mm



Fountain Lies The Sun, 2017  
Oil on canvas  
610x460mm

