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**ART  
MAZE  
Mag**





www.fayeweiwei.com

# A red blooded heart pulsing in my pocket: in conversation with Faye Wei Wei

British-Chinese artist Faye Wei Wei's poetic and seductive artwork brings together eclectic fragments of mythologies, folklore, art history and her own idiosyncratic iconography. Her large-scale paintings of figures, animals and more obscure motifs convey a rich interior world of symbolism and narrative. Faye's style of paintings is tinged with a child-like naivety and surrealism. Her compositions are non-hierarchical with each motif swimming fluidly and alluring above the background, conveying transcendent and illusive narratives that seem to emerge from a deep dreamspace.

For Faye, mark-making is a form of ritual, practiced daily in the sacred space of her private studio. In her art, reality merges seamlessly with personal histories, memory and the dreamlike world of her own creation. "Born from the loneliness of being in a studio, the objects that I have collected find their way onto the canvas, directed by the narrative created from the beautiful words that float around my mind from poems I read that morning," Faye explains, "the meaning behind the symbolism that the objects hold are endless for me, sometimes they're secrets, mine to keep."

Her dreamlike paintings are conceived first in drawings, where Faye tests out and follows the seductive flow and rhythm of a line on paper. Her paintings on canvas evolve the drawings with a subtle interplay of positive and negative space. She describes this as a "way of drawing figuratively with the sensuality of abstract painting and the joyful emotional description of a line."

A 2016 graduate of the Slade School of Fine Art and recipient of the Cass Art Painting Prize, Faye is a young artist to watch. She has exhibited extensively in the UK and further afield and recent solo exhibitions include Sweet Bitter, Valentine at SADE Gallery in Los Angeles, USA and Anemones and Lovers at Cob Gallery in London.

interview by Maria Zemtsova  
text by Layla Leiman

Featured image:

Faye Wei Wei  
*To Prepare A Face to Meet The Faces That You Meet*  
oil on linen  
2500 x 2000 mm







Photograph by Vivek Vadoliya

*AMM: What was your first art-related memory?*

FWW: I remember visiting 簡頭圍 the village in Hong Kong where my father grew up to visit my grandmother in the summer time. I was very young maybe 6 or 7. We burnt Chinese gold spirit money and incense as an offering to Buddha and our ancestors, I remember vividly the smell of the incense 3 sticks at a time, our bodies bowing, our hearts wishing. I remember that day my little brother burning his hand on the flame and my grandmother putting some herbal balm on it then, to ease the pain, we played a game...drawing in the sand. We were each given a stick and we drew portraits of each other in the sand, I've always loved the feeling of drawing, the beauty and simplicity of it. A limitless practice of mark making intertwined with memory and ritual—the simplicity of a mark in the sand.

*AMM: Were you brought up in a creative environment?*

FWW: Not at all, but my father is an antiques dealer and has a beautiful eye. I grew up appreciating Chinese porcelain and jade treasures. That cloudy green stone is so seductive to me.

*AMM: The captivating narratives in your compositions hint of romanticism yet the child-like painting demeanor brings a very contemporary feel to your work. Can you tell us more about your visual language and how it developed?*

FWW: I remember my tutor Peter Davies at the Slade talking about one of my paintings, a giant painting of a blue pony I think. He said he found that painting striking because of the child-like feeling it has, a trembling blue arch to form the legs of the horse and a big red dripping heart, but the scale creates a tension that feels contemporary because a child wouldn't paint at such an imposing scale.

I started out doing abstract paintings at the Slade, then one day I was feeling frustrated with it and went for a walk to the British Museum - an infinite precious gem of a museum. I've always loved the Egyptian section, all the gold, the decorative inlaid jewels, the ancient glass vases which I can't quite believe, the incredibly intricate and skilled line work in the drawings, there is such weight in between two thin lines describing a body, something I admire in Picasso's drawings so much too, the carving on the faces of the sculptures with their piercing eyes—pools of water eyes like planets. I drew one of them with a long head to indicate intelligence. The drawing was simple, quickly formed but it changed everything for me. From that moment things sort of clicked, a way of drawing figuratively with the sensuality of abstract painting and the joyful emotional description of a line.

*AMM: Where do you look for inspiration when planning new work? Do you sketch a lot before*

*you interpret ideas to large scale or does your process have more of a spontaneous nature?*

FWW: I think drawing is such a fluid, stimulating and beautiful thing to do, I draw every single day. At the moment I'm carrying around only red Caran d'Ache pencils and a Moleskine. With the continuity of them being red, it feels as if I have a kind of red blooded heart pulsing in my pocket. Oh red! She's such a powerful emotive colour, these drawings lately feel piercing, punchy, romantic. Recently I have been producing monoprints, with artist Nicole Wittenberg a dear friend I admire hugely. It has been an incredibly inspiring process, all the accidents and failures and merging of the colours and marks. Each figure kissing into the space around them.

*“I’ve always loved the feeling of drawing, the beauty and simplicity of it. A limitless practice of mark making intertwined with memory and ritual—the simplicity of a mark in the sand.”*

*- Faye Wei Wei*

*AMM: Your colour palette is relatively limited, you seem to give preference to earthy tones, such as mixes of brown, green, red, yellow etc. How does colour relate to the narratives and compositions in your works?*

FWW: Browns, greens and deep greys are all my favourite colours for describing the human figure—there's a softness and warmth in them that I am always drawn to. Pale yellow flowers are the most beautiful, blue grey flowers the second most and red should be reserved for flesh, blood, the sun—for love.

*AMM: Prominent human figures frequently appear together with animalistic creatures such as horses, snakes and sometimes alligators, birds and wild cats in your compositions. Could you tell us more about how these characters are coexisting coherently in the narratives of your paintings and what do they represent?*

FWW: There is definitely a merging of my reality and the dreamlike world I have created. Born from the loneliness of being in a studio, the objects that I have collected find their way onto the canvas, directed by the narrative created from the beautiful words that float around my mind from poems I read that morning. The meanings behind the symbolism that the objects hold are endless for me, sometimes they're secrets, mine to keep.

*AMM: Many of your compositions often leave a good amount of space in between the main figures and objects in the paintings. What role does space play within the content of your work?*

FWW: I like to leave space around the figures as a way of respect to the hierarchy of them, they stand out more this way. I remember learning about a sculpture of David and Goliath, young David stands against a blank backdrop of a plain unarticulated alcove—the simplicity of the backdrop appears to push him forward emphasising his importance and bravery. The way I work is kind of backwards, the figures and motifs are usually painted first, then the background is flooded with pigments after. The fluidity of the brush marks creates a variation of surface textures that are revealed under different lights and from different angles appearing like feathers or pools of light like the surface of a pond.

*AMM: Describe your usual day in the studio. What are your creative rituals?*

FWW: I make breakfast - a little bowl of rice with natto and some strong English Breakfast tea in a mug made by a Japanese artist that I've drunk tea out of every morning for maybe a decade. Tea infused ceramics makes the tea taste better I believe. Usually, I will sit on the floor and read poems and finger through all my books. I'll begin to draw and that will usually develop into a larger scale painting by the end of the day. My studio space is a sacred space to me, it feels very moving to be in there.

*AMM: Since graduating in 2016 from Slade School of Fine Art you have had several solo shows across the UK and in the US as well as multiple group shows. Could you tell us more about how your art has evolved after you started working as an independent artist, engaging with national and international galleries?*

FWW: I think it's evolved faster than it did when I was at Slade, just because I'm lucky to be able to work in my own space alone, I like this solitude and I think it feeds into my work well. I'm now much more disciplined, enough to be self motivated and critical in my own space, which is something I've had to learn to be these past two years. It's been an amazing experience to be able to show around the world, one show seems to lead to the next and I've met amazing people along the way many of whom have been so encouraging of me to pursue my own work however I want





and who have allowed me to be totally in control of what I’m showing and what I’m making.

*AMM: What were the main difficulties of emerging from student art life to being a fully independent artist? Do you have any advice to recent graduates?*

FWW: I’ve been lucky, I seemed to have met the right people at the right time, but I suppose I put myself in situations where I’m constantly around other creative friends and people. Go to shows, speak to artists you admire. Also I think just work really hard at art school, don’t be distracted, don’t waste that precious time, then carry on after school, work hard, and be kind and trust people more than you think you should, and when you find your loves hold on to them, support each other, find your spaces... speaking of love I really miss my best friend the amazing artist Jonathan Small just moved back to America, I’m so heart-broken! But he’s making some amazing things for Miami NADA so watch out world.

*AMM: You are currently one of the represented artists by Cob Gallery in London with whom you had a solo show this April “Anemones and Lovers” as well as currently having work in a group show “New Work Part III: Subject”. Could you tell us more about your collaboration with the Gallery and how it developed?*

FWW: Oh Cassie and Victoria, they are such amazing intelligent kind people who I am so blessed to have in my life, we met at an opening after party, I lit Cassie’s cigarette and the rest is history I guess. Cob has given me the platform to become a full time artist, and they help me out with the paperwork pressy things I’m not so good at! Lots of love to Cob!

*AMM: How do you think your work translates to the viewer in solo representation vs in a group show with other artists?*

FWW: There’s a lot more weight on myself when I do a solo show, I had my first one in America this summer ‘Sweet Bitter, Valentine’ at SADE gallery—it was so much fun, I wore a fairy tale of a dress and I was so scared I wondered if anyone would turn up, but it ended up overflowing onto the streets, crowded with warm and beautiful people. My fairy tale friend Leopold held my hand the whole night and wore a picture of me in his breast pocket, he felt like my lucky charm, everything went amazingly. I think solo shows feel very vulnerable but that intimacy is very stimulating and important, I am so moved by those moments when someone tells me their interpretation of the paintings or why they like them, I love that they make me aware of my own world, the viewers notice things I never would have seen myself.

In group shows it feels more like you’re a part of a family, it feels amazing and always an honour to have shown with so many amazing artists. When they work it’s really magic and

makes me feel a part of something bigger.

*AMM: Which artists or art movements have sparked your attention throughout your career?*

FWW: I just saw a Foujita exhibition in Kyoto today and it broke my heart the way he describes the folds of fabric that sing around the bodies of the women. There is so much poetry in that fabric, Foujita folds. I think my friends are making such exciting work, Lotte Andersen, Mariann Metsis, Jonathan Small, Lowe Poulter, Matthias Garcia. Matthias just had a solo show at KG cornerprinting gallery in Nakano, Tokyo, I love his work so much these bruised fairy tale drawings with lines that dance atop the stains like they are constantly kissing, mingling, telling love secrets, making love rituals.

*AMM: How do you navigate the art world or in particular London’s art scene?*

FWW: I have no idea... it’s very fun and overwhelming, the art world in London is very supportive if you need it to be. I think I’m lucky I have my friends around me who are all so hardworking and successful and that’s super inspiring to me. I’m starting to love London again, I was really in love with Berlin and New York and Paris and Tokyo for a while this year, but London will always be my home, I think I always miss her when I’ve been away for such a long time.

*AMM: What are some of your interests besides making art?*

FWW: Eating food.

*AMM: In a recent interview with British Vogue you mentioned you like to rent an apartment in Tokyo whenever you can for at least a few months. Could you tell us more about your travel experiences and how they affect your work?*

FWW: It’s always such a pleasure and such a treat to visit Tokyo, I’m currently writing this on the bullet train to Kyoto, I love my friends here, I love the trees here, they sit amongst the houses like they know things we don’t, I love the colours and the tastes, little sun bleached objects in the window of a cafe, I love hot springs and sake and uni sushi. It’s all just so magical to me more than anything the feeling I have of being here that romantic feeling inspired my work endlessly.

*AMM: When and where are you most happy?*

FWW: When I’m curled up in a ball with Henry in Berlin.

*AMM: What is your most precious possession?*

FWW: My mother and father’s wedding rings that I wear around my neck.

*AMM: What does the future hold for you?*

FWW: Red paintings.

Image:

Faye Wei Wei  
*Adonis And His Snake*  
oil on canvas  
460 x 610 mm





Faye Wei Wei  
*Goodbye*  
 oil on canvas  
 1830 x 1270 mm



Faye Wei Wei  
*I Want to See the Stars with My Own Handmade Telescope*  
 oil on linen  
 2500 x 2000 mm





Faye Wei Wei  
*The Effect Of Moon Baths Was Unknown*  
 oil on linen  
 2500 x 2000 mm



Faye Wei Wei  
*February 13th*  
 oil on canvas  
 1830 x 1370 mm





Faye Wei Wei  
*Bitter Lake*  
 oil on canvas  
 1050 x 900 mm



Faye Wei Wei  
*I Did Not Know You Would Fade So Soon, Oh Flower*  
 oil on canvas  
 1830 x 1370 mm





Faye Wei Wei  
*Anemones And Lovers*  
 oil on canvas  
 1830 x 1370 mm



Faye Wei Wei  
*Two Pearls On An Ebony Table*  
 (Those Are Pearls That Were His Eyes/ Saint Lucy)  
 oil on canvas  
 1070 x 910 mm