

STUDIO WEST
PRESENTS
TOMORROW WILL BE THE MOST BEAUTIFUL DAY OF YOUR LIFE
VICTORIA CANTONS and XU YANG



Victoria Cantons and Xu Yang. Photo credit: Charlie Tronchot

11th November - 15th December 2021
Private View by Invitation 10th November 4-6pm
Opening Drinks 6:30-8:30pm

Studio West is proud to present its inaugural exhibition, *Tomorrow Will Be The Most Beautiful Day Of Your Life*, displaying new works by artist couple Victoria Cantons and Xu Yang. This will be their first show as a duo, presented in celebration of their creative and personal collaboration. Cantons and Xu share a studio and work in conversation, questioning how art operates as a redeeming medium and addressing themes of uncertainty, identity and the female gaze. The exhibition is unique in that it shows work of two artists who are intensely bonded, known for creating depictions of one another and working in unison.

"It's more than just a show where two disparate artists are being brought together to see what happens, it's a show of two really intertwined, interconnected, symbiotic practices."
Victoria Cantons

The show title speaks to hope, love and positivity. Both artists see the exhibition as carrying a message of promise, offering the idea that if you seek to be your best self you will be met with a brighter tomorrow. It also relates to their ongoing relationship and the challenges they have overcome to sustain it. Both artists explore ideas of identity through their work, but what

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emerges in this exhibition is that they are their most true and comfortable selves when working and creating together.

The exhibition includes Victoria Cantons' stunning floral paintings and works spanning painting and performance from Xu Yang's diverse practice. For Cantons, the floral paintings emerged as a key facet of her work after the death of her mother.

As a child, Victoria would photograph her mother's rose bushes in their garden, and today she still paints her floral works from living, wild plants rather than arranged bunches. These large-scale works are tactile, delicate and beautiful, with a gentle use of colour that conjures an immersive sense of romance.

"I am not a transgender artist but rather an artist who happens to be a woman and transgender. Having lived whilst being perceived to be a man and now being understood and recognised as a woman has given me a rare perspective"

Victoria Cantons

Cantons' practice is always self-referential. She uses drawings and written notes combined with found and made photographs to explore her past experiences, and present emotions. Cantons fills sketchbooks that rarely leave her side with affirmations, poetry, and sketches of individuals and objects that she holds dear. As such, it is unsurprising that Xu regularly appears as a central figure in Cantons' work. Close up, delicate images of Xu's face, attended to with immense care and admiration, highlight the intensity of their affection. Cantons also regularly photographs and documents Xu's complex and emotive performance work.

"I love how our work is entwined. I love the way she paints me; they look different than when she paints other subjects. She treats the paintings of me more carefully, I can see in the way she is painting, handling the brushes, I think she's more focused." Xu Yang



Xu Yang will exhibit paintings and performance works that bring fantasy into reality. For these pieces, Xu wears intricate costumes, pink wigs and sentimental jewels while moving silently through space and presenting a private, alter-ego for scrutiny. Her performances are both autobiographical and confessional, they explore her complex identity, the construction of gender and the female gaze while creating a realm for reclaiming herself through femininity.

As a child growing up in China, Yang was discouraged from wearing flamboyant clothing and appearing overtly feminine. On moving to London, she was exposed to the local drag scene and the gregarious explorations of gender and identity that it encompassed. This influenced her performative work, which exists as a form of rebellion and rejects the restrictions placed on her self-expression throughout her upbringing.

Their practices are heavily influenced by each other, they offer one another technical advice, references, and critique. Together they visit exhibitions, exchange notes, and educate one another on canonical works throughout the history of art. Xu recalls being particularly taken with shared visits to National Trust properties from the early days of their relationship. Xu's paintings are imbued with ornamentation, details which recall French Rococo and the bedroom decoration of stately homes from the 17th and 18th centuries.

She often uses mirrors in her work, recalling Velasquez's *Las Meninas* and vanity paintings of reclining Venuses by artists such as Titian. Her female figures appear nude in rooms draped with lavish red velvets besides symbolic objects such as peacock feathers. For Cantons, Titian and Goya are also touch stones, along with contemporary woman painters such as Jenny Saville. Cantons sources inspiration for her work from an enormous range of material, noting that Hisham Matar's memoir *A Month in Sienna* and Julian Schnabel's film *Before Night Falls* have been at the forefront of her mind during the creation of these works.

The exhibition promises to be a decidedly personal view into the creativity and connection shared by this artist couple. The artworks, created in unison, will present viewers with an intimate account of an exceptional relationship between two artists at the forefront of contemporary painting.

ABOUT VICTORIA CANTONS

The human condition and questions of identity are central to Victoria Cantons' work. Through figurative painting, she investigates themes of power, identity, and male and female perceptions of each other. She is interested in the dialogue between painting's contemporary iterations and its histories, and uses a range of mediums, including drawing, writing and photography to navigate between intuitive, intellectual, and aesthetic content informed by a multinational, cultural and religious background.

In 2021, she completed an MFA at Slade, University of London after studying a BA at Wimbledon College of Art. She has exhibited widely, in both established and cutting-edge contemporary galleries including Saatchi Gallery, The White Cube, The Royal Academy, Flowers Gallery and Guts Gallery. In October 2020, and again this year she curated the Slade Graduate showcase as a part of *London Grads Now* at the Saatchi Gallery.

She was selected as one of the "Six artists reshaping our way or seeing" by the Financial Times and chosen as one of four artists to represent the spirit and issues of the FT Weekend Festival

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in September 2021. Her painting, *A way to keep what's vital from being lost* or *Sometimes all I think about is you* was featured on 1200 tote bags given to the festival's visitors. She received the Felix Slade Scholarship in 2018 and was shortlisted for the Chadwell Award in 2021. @victoriacantons

ABOUT XU YANG

Xu Yang is a London based artist born in Shandong, China. She completed her undergraduate at Wimbledon College of Arts and her MA in painting at Royal College of Art. She explores the construction of identity through a contemporary female gaze. Drawing on art history, fashion, fairy tale and performance, Xu pushes beyond the canvas and behind the mask to question reality. Identity, perception and imagination are all key to understanding her universe.

Xu was the winner of Barbican Arts Group Trust ArtWorks Open 2019 followed by a solo exhibition "*100 Carat Diamond*", BAGT ArtWorks Project Space (2020). Xu has been nominated for the Contemporary Young Artist (2020), and has curated a showcase of RCA fine art Graduates for Kovet.art gallery (2021).

Recent group exhibitions include *Photo London* with Kovet.art (2021), "*Bums*", Dio Horia curated by Skip gallery (2021), "*Redirecting*", Tree Museum China (2021), "*Softer Softest*", Andrea Festa Gallery (2021) "*London Grads Now.*" (The RCA selection), Saatchi Gallery (2020), Residency Project: "*On the Mountain We Stay Residency End*", NoSpace Organisation (2019).

Xu was featured in Elephant Magazine: "These Are the Artists You Need to Know Right Now" (2020), The Guardian "The cheek of it: artists celebrate the bottom – in pictures" (2021), Vogue Singapore, The Sunday Times, ArtConnect, FAD Magazine, Exibart, Art She Says and other publications.

Xu has contributed to collaborative art projects '*Imaging Technologies*' With *Painting Research* at Wimbledon College of Arts at Tate Modern (2017) and '*Here she Comes*' with Monster Chetwynd at Royal Festival Hall (2016). Her works have been exhibited in London, Shanghai, Venice, Athens and across the USA. @_xu.yang_

ABOUT STUDIO WEST

Studio West is a new cultural hotspot in Notting Hill founded by curator Caroline Boseley. The gallery is focused on showing work by emerging and newly established London based artists, offering them support, mentorship and hosting opportunities that showcase the most exciting upcoming talents. Studio West offers a new approach to commercial, contemporary art – it puts artists needs at the forefront and nurtures an awareness of the local community within which it operates. @studio_west_gallery

VICTORIA CANTONS AND XU YANG ARE AVAILABLE FOR INTERVIEW
PRESS ENQUIRIES | IMAGES

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LISTINGS INFORMATION

Tomorrow Will Be The Most Beautiful Day Of Your Life

Victoria Cantons and Xu Yang

11th November - 15th December 2021

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Unit 1, 216 Kensington Park Road, London, W11 1NR

Nearest Tube: Ladbroke Grove / Notting Hill Gate

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