

# Art & Ponder by Liam Otero



# Exhibition Review: “Wang Ye: Legume Blossoms in Blue” at YveYANG Gallery

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By Liam Otero

For as long as I live, I hope I never hear the expression “Painting is Dead!” as that is one of the most inane statements made about a medium whose practitioners are continually reinventing the wheel of painting, not just in appearance but also in its physical nature. Wang Ye (Chinese, b. 1991) is an artist who completely dismantles this notion that looking at painting entails observation from a sole vantage point (directly in front of the work). Studying Ye’s paintings feels more akin to the spatial relationship one forges with a sculpture as opposed to a two-dimensional object. Their practice is not conventional painting, the word does not even come up in the exhibition’s press release. There are no brushstrokes, no gestures, and no canvas support. Instead, Ye’s work is a literal threading of handmade silk embroidery that produce magnificent compositions of rhythmic patterns, dazzling lights, and piquant coloration; these attributes are subject to change based on the angle from which you stand as the lighting and shades alter as you change your angle, be it a shift from left to right or looking more askance than frontally. This is painting without painting.

Though their work is more in tune with holography as noted in a recent review from TUSSELE Magazine, I cannot let go of

the fact that Ye’s images operate in the language of painting, albeit without any real paints. The perceptual experimentation behind the painting techniques of the French Impressionists is an important influence on Ye’s lively visual discourse of transformative perspectives. But there is a sort of “East meets West” dialecticism as that Impressionist connection is not the sole impetus behind their work. Born in Changsha in the province of Hunan, Ye’s interest in embroidery is intrinsically linked to their geographic origins as Changsha is the epicenter of traditional Xiang embroidery, one of the most coveted forms of Chinese folk art. Silk is used for the threads owing to their material durability, elasticity, and absorption of dyes, of which Ye’s works in this show alone seem to capture every kind of color.

*The Room with the View* (2025), possibly the most classical of Ye’s images, could easily trick your mind into believing you are witness to a contemporary interpretation of a Monet or Pissarro interior painting. However, a meticulous layering of colored threads are the very bedrock that yields such a florid and sumptuous scene that is embroidery masking as a painterly image.

Works like *When Time Folds* (2025) are more commonplace in the exhibition than the overt subject of *The Room with the View* (2025) because these

appear as close-ups of patterns or textures, sometimes on the threshold between abstraction and figuration. *When Time Folds* resembles an aerial view of a landscape with a possible ocean tide in the lowest register, followed by a sandy beach that gradually transitions to a green pastoral landscape. Then again, the tropical hues here also reminded me of a toucan - an odd coincidence that I keep encountering abstract works over the last few months that possess a toucan color scheme.

*Everything Daisy* (2025) takes a radically different approach to sight as the image feels like we are seeing a bed of flowers through the perspective of a mid-fall water droplet denoted in the central circle surrounded by a stretched view of suggested grass blades and floral buds.

All of the painting-esque works are held in wide silver artist frames, often encompassing more square inches of space than the actual image contained within. The importance of frames and how they affect an artwork’s appearance remains a grossly overlooked topic, and Ye’s exhibition is an excellent case for how you cannot just use any frame to surround a piece. Given the transformative light-color changes that occur dependent on the atmospheric conditions of the works in situ along with that of the viewer’s physical

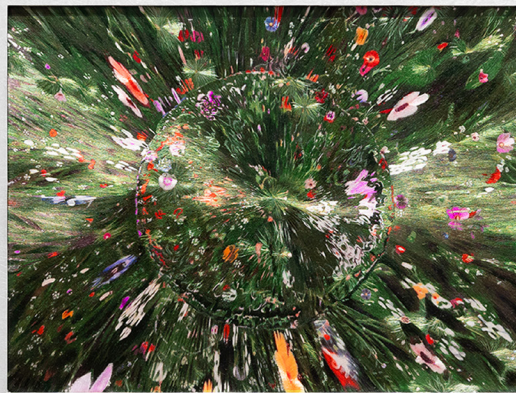
relationship to them, the silver frames, too, wield an integral role in the absorption, reflection, and refraction of luminescence and coloration. If there were no frames or a much thinner frame around these works, I think Ye's images would not have even remotely attained the same degree of visual zhuzh that I was able to appreciate.

In conjunction with these framed works, there were epic columns of color, also created entirely from silk threads, hung from floor-to-ceiling. Much like an elaborate quilt design, a multitudinous patchwork

of shades felt like a vertically-oriented rainbow that takes a top-bottom / bottom-top approach to understanding color theory.

Wang Ye, whose work was also exhibited at this year's Armory Show via the gallery's booth, is fast becoming an important figure in both Chinese folk art and Contemporary global folk art. Though their work in this show is exclusively embroidery, I thought it was important to make a case for their creativity to challenge this idea that a painting can only be a painting if it is made from pigments in oil, acrylic, gouache, etc. that are physically applied

through some implement. The organization of dyed threads via a needle to conceive images that come across - either in a passing glance or through a photographic / digital reproduction - as "painterly" seems to upend or shake up the solidity of the parameters of how paintings exist.



Wang Ye (Chinese, b. 1991), Everything Daisy, 2025, handmade silk embroidery. Image courtesy of YveYANG Gallery, SoHo.