

Interview

“I’m Not Thinking About Buying”: Meet the Gallerists Reviving NYC’s Art Scene

By Drew Zeiba
Photographed by Mary Manning

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YVE YANG and CHANDO AO



DREW ZEIBA: How do you start working with artists you’re interested in? What’s your relationship like with them?

YVE YANG: Usually, we do studio visits with them. It was probably two or three rounds of studio visits in half a year for this exhibition [this sentence no sentence]. Also, after the group exhibition, we will talk to each of the artists. For example, we’ve already talked with Soren Hope and Ang [Ziqi Zhang] for a solo show in the coming fall and next spring.

ZEIBA: Chando, I know you’re a practicing artist. How did you two come together? And how does your practice as an artist inform the gallery?

CHANDO AO: We met in Boston.

YANG: A long time ago. Before we both entered into the art thing. We met in a university where I was in a master's program and I was studying technological entrepreneurship. We were both from non-art backgrounds and we just went to galleries, museums in New York and we slowly found this interest in art. So he transferred his major and I was doing some other business, like startups. And slowly we decided that he wanted to practice as an artist and we wanted to do gallery.

AO: Yve is a serial entrepreneur. For me, I have sort of a complicated background where I grew up in China. I went to school in three different countries: China, Australia, United States. And I have been through three different majors, economy, engineering, and art, then four different colleges, Northeastern, Tufts SMFA, and MIT.

ZEIBA: You guys had a space in Boston too, right?

YANG: Yes.

ZEIBA: So when you moved to New York, you already had a gallery in mind?

YANG: It was a very interesting, fun, successful year in Boston. We had seven exhibitions there in eight months. And people really appreciated that we were doing something very different compared with other galleries in Boston at that time. But the difficult part is we have a lot of writer connections in New York and they never wanted to come to Boston to see a show and to write something up for us. I felt like we had to make the move, just for the gallery, not for our personal lives. We loved Boston a lot.

ZEIBA: What's been the biggest difference between running a gallery in New York and Boston?

YANG: I feel like audiences are very different.

AO: While we were in Boston, there were a lot of scientists or people in different professional disciplines that came to see our shows. In New York, I feel like it's a very professional art world, it's very direct. They understand what contemporary art is, and you don't really have to do pre-education, which makes it almost become very efficient.

YANG: Also, I found it interesting that in this location, the Soho area, it's supposed to be a lot of random pedestrians, but actually it's not. Pedestrians probably stop by Grand Street. They never walk in this direction.

ZEIBA: When you've put up a show, do you have an ideal audience in mind?

AO: I mean, the show is purely for the artist. We do have audience in mind.

YANG: Before the pandemic, we found more international travelers that we met everywhere in the world, maybe from Brazil or Belgium, maybe in China. But during the pandemic, we definitely met a lot less of those people. But they are very interesting people and they have very different perspectives, or I should say a broader perspective.

ZEIBA: Obviously, Boston has a much smaller gallery system. When you relocated to New York, was there something missing in this city's gallery landscape you sought to fill? What sorts of perspectives are you trying to foreground with this gallery that you don't see from other galleries or institutions?

YANG: When we were in Boston, we were doing a lot of interactive technology art. Compared with the whole Boston art scene, we are very contemporary, very experimental. And here in New York, we had a midtown location before we moved here. That was before the pandemic, 2017 to 2020, and we also tried to do very experimental things in that space. And now that we moved here, we want to be more complete, not just experimental driven.

AO: What YveYANG can offer is non-binary, non-white, almost like a cross-continental vision that is not really included in the mainstream. To have a different perspective, to have a different viewpoint I think is what is very important for YveYANG.

ZEIBA: What inspired you to move downtown?

AO: For our audience. Our audience is more downtown, whether international or living in the Lower East Side or Brooklyn. So it's definitely more accessible, more pleasant.

ZEIBA: Looking at this show, I'm wondering how you think about putting an exhibition together visually and spatially.

AO: The way that we work is Yve will come up with the structure with the artist. And then I will come in to talk to each one to see how they sort of work out conceptually together. And visually, once you understand the space well, and you understand the work well enough, that will guide you to make the most sensible decision. We don't really decide which work goes where; the artist and the work decides, in my opinion.

YANG: Chando helps me a lot with the exhibition design conceptually. And we have very different personalities. He's always in the sky and I'm a person on the ground.

ZEIBA: You were describing the more experimental stuff you used to focus on and still do. What did you mean by that?

AO: I will pick one of the very early works we did. It's Image of the City by Bjørn Sparrman, where he did a marble sculpture, which is vibrating from sound. And the sound is actually the sound of crickets.

YANG: The most experimental thing we've ever done is one exhibition that we did in Shanghai in 2018, the first solo exhibition we did with David O'Reilly. He is an animator and a game developer. But before we did this first solo exhibition with him, he never did a serious art exhibition.

AO: His medium is animation and games.

YANG: So we rented a pop-up space in Shanghai and we activated his game and people could come play the game in the gallery with a huge projection screen.

AO: I think what makes that show so radical is that the game he made is actually a self-generated game. It's kind of like what AI does right now, but it's like before all this went viral. So he's been a very early pioneer in that discipline and medium.

ZEIBA: My last question is, what makes a good opening?

AO: That's actually a really simple one for me. A good audience makes a good opening. A good audience is somebody who enjoys the art, enjoys the moment, and can actually have fun with the artist. I feel like the opening is really a cherished moment for the artist who created the show.

