

ARTnews

Newsmakers: A Beloved New York Alternative Art Space Returns with Xiaoyu Weng at the Helm

BY ALEX GREENBERGER August 13, 2025 9:00am



Xiaoyu Weng.

PHOTO CHRISTIAN NYAMPETA

Editor's Note: This story is part of **Newsmakers**, a new ARTnews series where we interview the movers and shakers who are making change in the art world.

The role of alternative art spaces in the New York art scene tends to get little play, in part because much of the shows mounted by them are highly conceptual and devoted to artists with smaller followings. But such a role became difficult to ignore in 2020, when New York **lost one of its most important alternative spaces, Art in General**, at the height of the Covid pandemic.

Nearly five years later, Art in General has plans to return. Once again, the nonprofit will mount exhibitions of commissioned works by rising artists and group shows centered around heady ideas. **Xiaoyu Weng**, a curator who currently leads the Tanoto Art Foundation and formerly led the Art Gallery of Ontario's modern and contemporary department, will serve as Art in General's new director.

Nearly five years later, Art in General has plans to return. Once again, the nonprofit will mount exhibitions of commissioned works by rising artists and group shows centered around heady ideas. Xiaoyu Weng, a curator who currently leads the Tanoto Art Foundation and formerly led the Art Gallery of Ontario's modern and contemporary department, will serve as Art in General's new director.

This new Art in General doesn't have a physical location, though Weng said that the organization is searching for one. In the interim, it will stage shows in various locations around New York, with the first, a fundraising exhibition, set to appear at YveYANG Gallery starting August 22. (The gallery's founder, Yve Yang, has also joined the board alongside digital strategist Jiajia Fei, artist Paul Pfeiffer, and curator and writer Jeanne Gerrity.)

Since its founding in 1981, Art in General had supported artists who had yet to receive fame and boosted their profile, with Cecilia Vicuña, Emma Amos, Postcommodity, Jill Magid, Sharon Hayes, and many more gaining crucial exposure through the organization. Weng said she intends to keep that spirit alive in this new iteration of Art in General.

ARTnews spoke with Weng about Art in General's history and how its new version will fill a gap in New York's scene.

This interview has been edited and condensed for clarity and concision.

ARTnews: This is a time when more art spaces are closing than opening in New York. Why relaunch Art in General now?

Xiaoyu Weng: A few of the old board members never really considered it to be completely dead. Leslie Ruff, president of the board, has been caretaking the legal status of its nonprofit status, hoping that one day, someone would bring it back. That's the foundation of it.

Looking at the bigger picture, the art world is going through a very interesting moment where, because of the social and political situations around the world, there is a lot of censorship going on. I think young artists are afraid to say certain things or make work expressing certain things in fear of being canceled. And then, on the other hand, we felt like the art world is growing more and more commercialized. There's very little space for young artists to do an ambitious project, if it was not endorsed by a more commercial entity. I think the same goes for young curators—there's not that much of a space for young curators to experiment. I do see all this as being very connected. It feeds into each other to shape a more healthy and sustainable art world where all these different areas need to be supported.

Do you believe spaces like Art in General will help remedy that?

Yes, I do think this is a great moment to rethink the alternative art space. What does it mean for the community, and what kind of platform and resource could it provide?

A lot of people say, "Oh, you guys are swimming against the current because this is not a good place to fundraise." People don't have a lot of extra cash to put in. But at the same time, I feel like maybe people are just more cautious about where they put their money. Maybe if it's for a good cause—if it's for something that is impactful—there will still be philanthropists around. And also, I really still think this model of collective funding is not outdated. We need that kind of open space for different voices to be heard—including for the patrons who would be able to give \$1,000 but are not giving money to huge museums.

How did you become involved with Art in General?

I was one of the honorees of Art in General in 2017, so that's how I became connected to it in a tangible way. It was also really formative for me as a young curator. When I came to New York to visit in the early days, I tended to go to smaller, independent art spaces to see instead of going to museums. I was really interested in looking at more experimental practices. So Art in General was one of the places that I frequented.

What do you think was Art in General's major contribution to the New York art scene? How will you build on its legacy?

Art in General was really looking at the art world from an international perspective. And it's very much connected to the social, political conditions of the art world. So, it truly was a contemporary space that was presenting art of our time. There was this really important program focused on East Asian and Eastern European artists. And then there was a big initiative focused on artists from Cuba and Latin America.

These are places and geographies that were not on the center stage of contemporary art during the '80s and '90s. Also, in speaking to Asian American artists like Paul Pfeiffer and Josh Kline [both of whom showed at Art in General early on], they were also finding their communities when they did not really find opportunities in other mainstream art space or museums. It created a sense of solidarity.

I also wanted to point out that though Art in General is a beloved space in New York, its impact is actually quite international and global. I was in Romania in 2023 for a curatorial workshop, and I came across this Romanian artist, Ioana Nemes [who died in 2011 while she was an artist in residence at Art in General]. Her work is being discovered right now in Romania and Eastern Europe, but reading her biography, I realized she actually had her debut solo exhibition at Art in General. Who knew this art space touched so many people's lives in a different part of the world?

Some of the galleries that have closed recently are smaller, with programs that tended toward conceptual art. Do you think Art in General is filling a gap they left behind?

Yes, definitely. I do understand there is commercial pressure for galleries, and I also understand that pressure. We wanted to step in and also continue some of the legacies of some of these really great galleries while also at the same time thinking about what can be done beyond a commercial model. And it's going to be a very challenging and experimental journey for us. We're just taking it one step at a time.