

Yve Yang, The First Decade

March 25, 2024

Boston's Hancock Building is the tallest skyscraper in New England. With glass curtain walls from head to toe, it blends in with the sky on a clear day. One day ten years ago, a girl from China couldn't help crying in the lobby. This building designed by I.M. Pei is her favorite building. The truck at the door is loaded with her favorite paintings, which come from an 80-year-old grandmother in Massachusetts. Her idea is to use the dining area in the lobby to hold a small exhibition for this octogenarian artist. She has been communicating with the building manager for a long time. After the other party finally agreed, she drove the truck for several hours, picked up these large and heavy works, and went to set up the exhibition in person. But when she got downstairs, she found that the building manager had changed.

This was Yve Yang's first attempt to organize an exhibition for artists. Before that, she co-founded several startups, but she never found her true passion in those fields until she first met art. At first, Yve wanted to combine her passion for art with the problem-solving ability of entrepreneurs, using the e-commerce thinking that was popular at the time to help young artists who had no agents and no exhibition opportunities through online trading platforms. Artsy had not yet been born, but Yve experienced what Artsy experienced later in a very short period of time. She also quickly realized that e-commerce thinking is not necessarily suitable for art. To truly help artists, it is still necessary to go deep into the creator community, start with practical small things, and grow with artists down to earth.



After repeated communication with the new manager of the building, the manager finally agreed to let her hang the works on the wall. This was the beginning of Yve Yang's career as a gallery owner, even though she didn't have a physical space at that time. This was probably the first time that Yve cried for the art industry. After the rain, the Hancock Building merged with the sky again, and the days in Boston were filled with laughter.

After using the space of an office building to hold exhibitions for a while, Yve rented a small semi-basement space in Boston's SoWa art district, and did a lot of crazy and fun things with a serious attitude.



The exterior of the gallery in Boston

For example, the gallery once held a small opera performance, composed by a professional composer, with live conducting and instrumental performance. "Liao Fei was a resident here for one or two months, and then he held a solo exhibition. Because of the special nature of his work, the entire space was very empty during the solo exhibition, as if nothing had happened. The artist and we felt it was very suitable for 'opera happening'. Every audience member who came was given a red silk scarf that could be tied anywhere, and the audience was also in the opera. The preparation time for 'happening' was very short, maybe at that time everyone was very young and motivated, and would do something without caring about how much effort it would take, nor would they care about the benefits."



During Liao Fei's exhibition in Boston, an immersive opera was held in the gallery.

Such activities have added a lot of fun to Boston, which was originally serious and full of academic atmosphere, and also established a group of loyal audiences in the local area. "Hundreds of people come to each opening. When the last exhibition opened, I really wanted to tell everyone that this was our last exhibition in Boston, but I couldn't say that sentence."



Sarafani Sisters performance, Boston.

In 2017, YveYANG Gallery officially left Boston and moved to New York. What awaits her in the center of world art are opportunities, challenges, a broader stage, and more rare friends and mutual appreciation.

The gallery's first location in New York was in the west of Midtown. After hosting several exhibitions, Yve decided that it was necessary to renovate the interior environment and create a space that was more suitable for the gallery's projects and concepts. For this purpose, she hired MOS Architects (a wellknown, niche and unique firm in the industry) to design the interior renovation.

The renovation took two years, and there were many twists and turns in the process, which also made Yve grow and mature rapidly. However, when I think back to the first renovation of the semi-basement space in Boston, I still feel very moved that I had the courage to be the general contractor in a foreign country and manage three groups of workers with different divisions of labor .

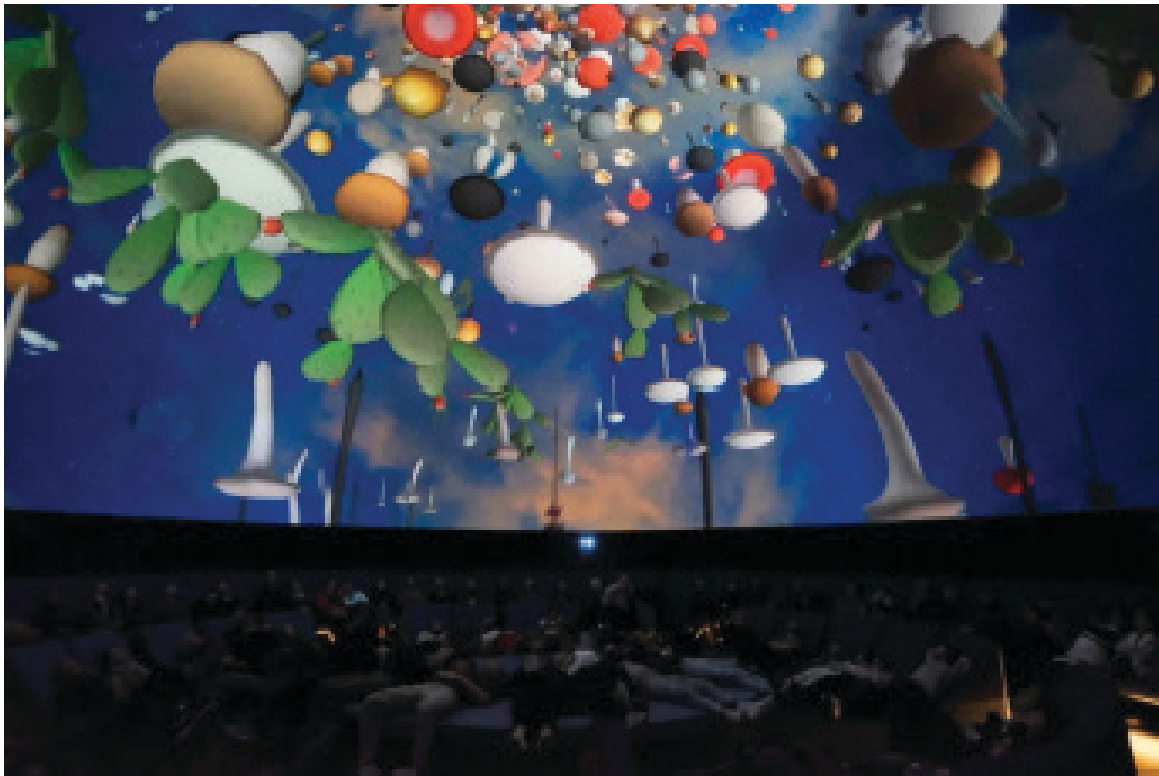
As a gallery owner who has been paying attention to technology, new media and interactive art for a long time, Yve met David O'Reilly in 2017. People who are familiar with animation or movies may know that his animated short film "Speak" won the Golden Bear Award for Best Short Film at the Berlin Film Festival in 2009; in the movie "Her", the little game played by the protagonist with a mouth full of "fuck you" was created by him. People who are familiar with games may know O'Reilly from "The Mountain", one of Steam's "Four Great Classics", or from the acclaimed independent game "Everything". This Irishman is one of the first people to make games into art and enter art galleries.



New York City Midtown space designed by MOS



David O'Reilly's film *Her*.



David O'Reilly's *Eye of the Dream*, Berlin, 2018. Image courtesy of the New Infinity, Berlin.

The acquaintance of O'Reilly was due to a question asked at a lecture. IN 2017, O'Reilly was invited to give a lecture at New York University. Yve and her partner, artist Chando Ao (Ao Qianlu), went there because of his reputation. During the lecture, they asked a question about how to view his works in the context of contemporary art, which made O'Reilly remember them and exchanged business cards. "I gave him one of my business cards and he gave me his email address. But because he was so famous, I never wrote to him after getting his email address because I thought he would ignore me. But he wrote to me instead." So, Yve took O'Reilly to see the space in Midtown, which was still in ruins at the time, with garbage piled up high as a floor. O'Reilly and Chando climbed to the top of the garbage. Yve stood below, pointed at the mountain of garbage and said, "We're going to have an exhibition here."



David O'Reilly giving a lecture in New York.



David O'Reilly in the ruins of YveYANG Gallery, New York.

O'Reilly wanted to try Yve's proposal. He had just finished his second game, Everything. Yve firmly believed that O'Reilly's work could and should enter the context of contemporary art, and in the continuous and unremitting communication, the two sides finally established trust. Although the space in New York was still a mess, O'Reilly still believed in Yve's vision. This vision was soon realized. During the 2018 West Sund Art Fair in Shanghai, the gallery rented a space in M50 and held O'Reilly's first solo exhibition in the context of art.

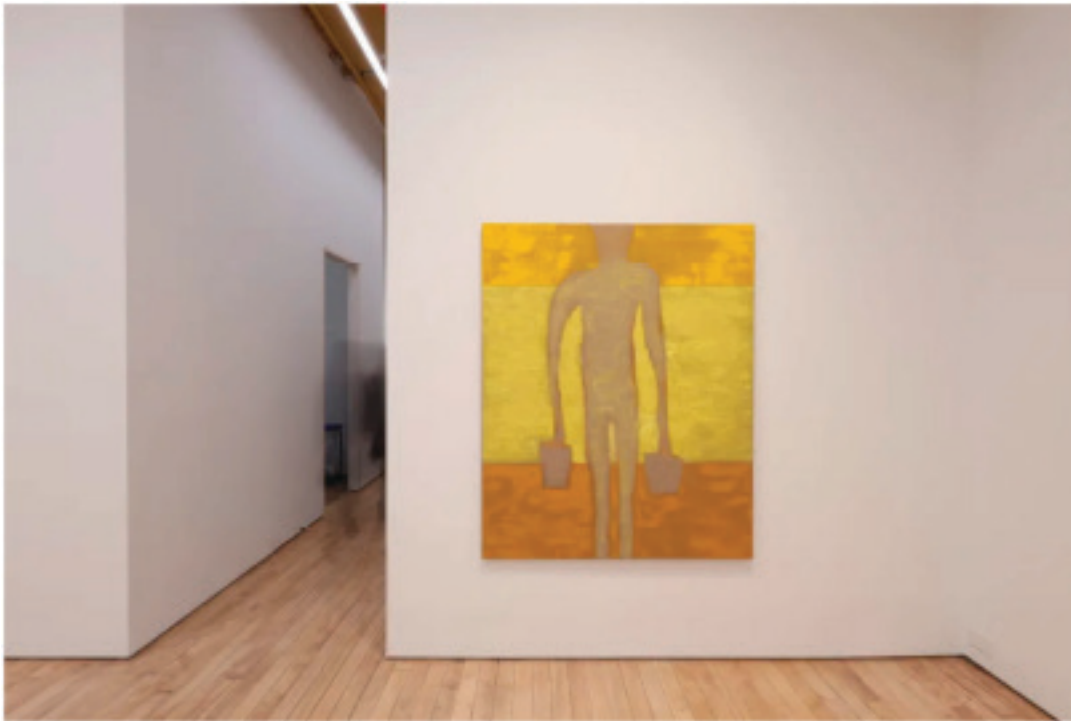


David O'Reilly's solo exhibition at M50, 2018.

The trust of artists has given Yve great encouragement. The space in Midtown was renovated after many twists and turns. Although the gallery moved to SoHo after only one exhibition there, all the artists who joined the gallery when it was first established are still following the gallery. Yve always feels that she has a responsibility. She believes that the gallery is a communication job, a process of building trust with artists and collectors; it is also a process of establishing connections with the world. Discovering good artists, letting more people know about them, and growing with them - this concept gives Yve motivation and nourishment to support her to move forward. Conversely, artists can devote themselves to creation because they receive enough support from the gallery. Sometimes, such support goes beyond the simple economic level and evolves into an emotional resonance.]

Yve likes to visit artists' studios. "When I see a good artist, I get very excited and secrete a lot of dopamine, so I often go on studio visits. If I'm nearby, I'll go to Yale and the Art Institute in New York. If I'm far away, I'll fly to exhibitions and visit artists all over the world."

Last year Yves made a special trip to Dusseldorf to visit a young artist named Anna-Maria Skroba, who was Peter Doig's last student at the Di.isseldorf Art Academy.

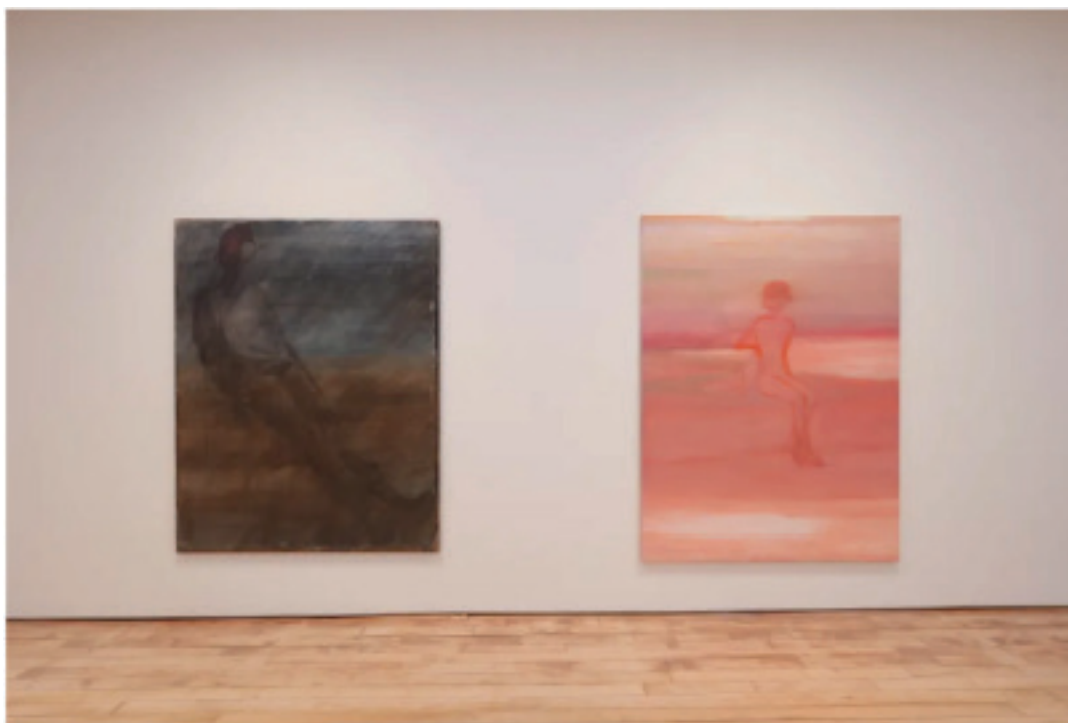


Installation view of Anna-Maria Skroba's solo exhibition at YveYANG Gallery, 2023.

"We had arranged to meet on WhatsApp, but when I arrived she wouldn't let me into her studio and blocked me at the door. She said, 'I don't know you, how can I let you into my studio?' She suggested we go to the bar next door for a drink.

"I can't drink at all, but I went with her anyway. I ordered a glass of water, she ordered a drink, and started smoking. I'm afraid of cigarettes. She smoked her own cigarettes, one after another. She asked a lot of questions, such as how the gallery started, why the gallery, and what kind of artists there are. It was like a census.

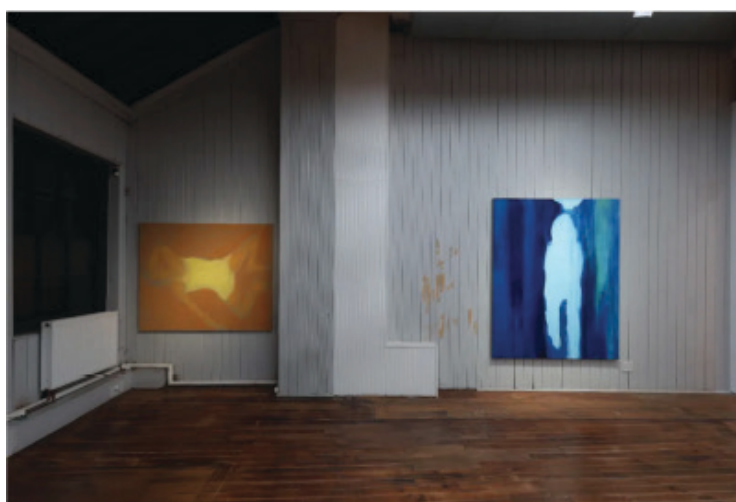
After talking for about an hour or two, she seemed to trust me and relax. She said, 'Now you can come with me to my studio.'



Installation view of Anna-Maria Skroba's solo exhibition at YveYANG Gallery, 2023.

"When we got to the studio, she sat on the windowsill and started smoking again. The paintings had already been hung on the walls before I went there. There was a work on each of the three walls. I looked at the paintings in that small square space for more than ten minutes. Then she asked me if I wanted to see a few more. Of course I did. At this time, she stood up, removed two of the paintings, and then brought two new ones from the corridor.

"When she changed the works, she was like a curator curating an exhibition for you. She changed two works at first, and then continued to change. When she changed the third round, I cried, and I couldn't stop crying. I have never cried in someone else's studio. The reason for crying is that the work really makes you very sad and painful, or I don't think it's painful, I can feel her brokenness. The work is a person painted on a piece of burlap, and the corners of the canvas are slightly broken. Later she told me that the painting was of herself."



Installation view of Anna-Maria Skroba's solo exhibition at YveYANG Gallery, 2023.

After returning to the United States, Yve gave Anna-Maria her first North American solo exhibition.

"After we got to know each other better, she said that my tears gave her nutrients that she could use for ten or twenty years."

Ten years is not a long time from the perspective of art history. However, for people in history, it is a precious period of life. Only those who have experienced it can truly understand the details. Others only see the exhibition and art. Little do they know that this requires the gallery owner and team to persist for many years and have a passion for art from beginning to end.



Anastazie Anderson's solo exhibition currently at YveYANG Gallery.

For a gallery owner who wants to make a long-term impact in the art world, the first ten years are used to lay the foundation, and it is also enough to test a person's perseverance and ideas. From the office building in Boston to the new space in SoHo, New York, from the West Bund in Shanghai to the Basel in Hong Kong, the changes in the exhibition space have witnessed the footsteps of YveYANG Gallery. At some point in the future, in the increasingly bright exhibition space, I wonder if she will still think of the administrator who did not allow her to hang paintings, and the complicated feelings she had at that time. Perhaps this is hidden in the original intention of a gallery owner.

Text and interview by Yuan Zheng.