

## Olivia Jia *Mirror stage*

Margot Samel is pleased to present *Mirror stage*, a new suite of paintings by the Philadelphia-based artist Olivia Jia (b.1994, Chicago, IL). This is the artist's second solo exhibition with the gallery.

In Olivia Jia's paintings, attentively rendered tableaus composed of the artist's family photographs and mementos mix with documents depicting artifacts that reference American and Chinese art history. These are arranged across broken mirrors, on opened books or their covers, and suspended in solemn dark abysses. Constructed by the artist, these fictive books lend continuity to disparate sources of imagery, and frame them within an imagined archival past. Techniques of hyper-realism, distortion, and an attention to color attempt to close the gap between present and historical selves. For Jia, painting gives form to what is collateral to the accidents and events of recent history—each work is an inquiry caught between the alienating generational experience of American immigration and a lost material culture of pre-20th century China.

If it is the historian's impulse to corral the clues of history into an analytic and linear structure that moves us towards an objective logic, then it is the artist's prerogative to remind us that history is something that is felt. Histories are stories that guide us to the present and teach us how to be with others, and how to be with ourselves. In her recent works, the artist finds herself exploring the affective negative spaces between the documents she collects, working through her desire and compulsion to fill such holes by treading the intangible pathways of subconscious and pre-colonial worlds. The psychoanalyst Carl Jung believed that one develops their personality through an identification with images, scenes, and figures derived from a collective unconscious. This he saw as inherited and shared among all human memory. Jia cites images of stairs, windows, and pathways of mysterious origin as she explores Jung's thesis, asking: how did she—as both herself and as proxy through a pool of synonymous experiences of those who come from generations of Chinese diaspora—get here? Through her own clues of history, unseen stories emerge that are felt, addressing the need to expand an understanding of historic archives in the absence of a direct material lineage.

In a figurative component to the exhibition, Jia depicts portraits of Chinese artists that range in origin from 1850–1950. She has an interest in the artifact itself, and our ability to capture life with the invention and intervention of photography. These paintings of imagined books and paper ephemera are often painted at a one-to-one scale—a trompe l'oeil effect that suggests the viewer is peering directly at the artist's workspace. Does making something appear real, make it real? Does our ability to render something with the implication of reality, make whatever it is we are capturing more tangible? In making the space of the painting, and

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its contents, relate directly to the lived experience of the objects within them, Jia demonstrates the experience of wandering through time's personal lapses. Throughout the exhibition, in an interpretative gesture that happens both inside and outside the frame, the past becomes mourned, celebrated, and animated in an identification of the intimate yet unbridgeable distance one has from the past.

—Emily Small

Olivia Jia (b.1994, Chicago, IL) is a Philadelphia-based artist. She received a BFA from the University of the Arts, Philadelphia in 2017. Honors include the Ellen Battell Stoeckel Fellowship to attend the Yale Norfolk Summer School of Art in 2015 and the President's Award at the University of the Arts. Recent solo exhibitions include *Mirror Stage*, Margot Samel, New York, NY (2025); *Nine Motifs*, Fleisher/Ollman, Philadelphia, PA (2023); *Perimeter* at Margot Samel, New York, NY (2023); and *Ex Libris* at Workplace, London, UK (2022). Selected group shows include *Thank you, I'm rested now. I'll have the lobster today, thank you*, Pangée, Montreal, Canada & Margot Samel, New York, NY, (2024); *Teach me how to fish*, Art Intelligence Global, Hong Kong (2024); *With yourself*, Gaa Projects, Cologne, Germany (2024); *Apricity*, 12.26, Dallas, TX (2023); *Untold Stories: Six Women Artists in Conversation*, Sugar Hill Children's Museum of Art & Storytelling, New York, US; *The Blue Hour*, Workplace, London, UK (2023); *To whom do I owe the power behind my voice?*, curated by Tally de Orellana, Commonweal, Philadelphia, PA (2023); *An Exchange of Shifting Atmospheres*, curated by Leslie Moody Castro and Ricky Yanas, La Nao, Mexico City, MX (2023); *To be a giant and keep quiet about it*, Margot Samel, New York, NY (2022); *Painting As Is II*, Nathalie Karg Gallery, New York, NY (2022); *Kaleidoscope*, Workplace, London, UK (2022); *To be a giant and keep quiet about it*, Yee Society, Hong Kong (2022); *An Exchange of Shifting Atmospheres*, curated by Leslie Moody Castro and Ricky Yanas, Tiger Strikes Asteroid, Philadelphia, PA (2022); *It feels like the first time*, Mana Contemporary, Chicago, IL (2021); *Room for One*, Napoleon Project Space, curated by Daniel Oliva, Philadelphia, PA (2020); *Second Nature: The Poetics of Re-presentation*, The Woodmere Museum 78th Annual Juried Exhibition, curated by Eileen Neff, Philadelphia, PA (2019); *Untitled*, Dongsomun, Seoul, Korea (2017). The artist would like to thank the Elizabeth Greenshields Foundation for its support of this exhibition.

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