

Leroy Johnson and Olivia Jia Condo 2026

Margot Samel is delighted to announce participation in Condo 2026, hosted by The Approach, London, and presenting a two-person exhibition of works by Leroy Johnson and Olivia Jia. Johnson and Jia shared a friendship in Philadelphia, and this presentation brings their work together for the first time.

With a documentarian's eye but a poet's gaze, Leroy Johnson (1937–2022, Philadelphia, PA) surveyed the pleasures, hardships, and contradictions within the Philadelphia neighbourhoods where he spent his life. Through his occupations as a social worker, rehab counsellor, teacher of disabled youth, and school administrator, Johnson pierced the fabric of collective human experience more deeply than most.

Constructed largely from materials found during his daily commutes, his house sculptures are replete with the textures of reality. Johnson represented the city as an accretion of marks. Intentional declarations graffitied on walls hold equal weight with the subtle beauty of the residue of life, of signage and surfaces worn and sunbleached past legibility—their degradation becomes, through Johnson's attention, painterly abstraction authored not by a single artistic hand but by the vast social forces at play. These sculptures are labyrinths of referent and possibility.

Painted with what she describes as a “nocturnal” palette, Olivia Jia (b. 1994, Chicago, IL) creates works with a somnambulant quality, appearing as if scenes encountered in a state between sleep and waking. Frequently depicting imagined books and ephemera, each painting is constructed around a tableau that the artist has arranged, incorporating material collected by herself or held by family members, alongside references to American and Chinese art histories. Informed by Jia's own diasporic identity as the child of Chinese immigrants to the United States, ideas of kinship, heritage, longing, and belonging are negotiated through the constellations of elements she gathers in her compositions. Staged in a studio workspace, depicted either late at night or in an imagined facsimile of that location, her paintings serve as tools with which a greater degree of self-recognition might be arrived at. The somberly lit surfaces upon which these objects and images appear function at once as tabletops or pinboards on which things might be placed, and as psychic spaces onto which desire might be projected.

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Leroy Johnson (1937-2022, Philadelphia, PA) received his master's degree in Human Services from Lincoln University in 1988. Johnson has presented solo exhibitions at Margot Samel, New York, NY (2025); Mercer County Community College, West Windsor, NJ (2023); The Clay Studio, Philadelphia, PA (2022), among others. His work has been included in group exhibitions at Villanova University Art Gallery (1983), the Camden

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County Historical Society (1990), Cheltenham Center for the Arts (1996), Gloucester County College (1998), The Clay Studio in Philadelphia (1997, 1999, and 2000), the Art Gallery at City Hall, Philadelphia (1998, 2015, 2017, and 2019), the African Jazz Museum, Kansas City (2002), List Gallery at Swarthmore College (2004), Philadelphia's Magic Gardens (2011), and Tiger Strikes Asteroid (2021). His work is in the collections of the American Museum of Ceramic Art in Pomona, California, the Clay Studio in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the Michener Museum in Doylestown, Pennsylvania, and the Philadelphia Art Museum in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Olivia Jia (b.1994, Chicago, IL) is based in Philadelphia, PA. 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 *Nocturnes*, BANK, Shanghai, China (2025), *Mirror stage*, Margot Samel, New York, NY (2025); *Nine Motifs*, Fleisher/Ollman, Philadelphia, PA (2023); *Perimeter*, Margot Samel, New York, NY (2023); and *Ex Libris*, Workplace, London, UK (2022). Selected group shows include: *Solar Music / Lunar Revel*, Uffner & Liu, New York, NY (2025); *Inside*, Fleisher/Ollman, Philadelphia, PA (2025); *Thank you, I'm rested now. I'll have the lobster today, thank you*, Pangée, Montreal, Canada & Margot Samel, New York, NY, (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 be a giant and keep quiet about it*, Margot Samel, New York, NY (2022); *Kaleidoscope*, Workplace, London, UK (2022); *To be a giant and keep quiet about it*, Yee Society, Hong Kong (2022); *Tiger Strikes Asteroid*, Philadelphia, PA (2022); *It feels like the first time*, Mana Contemporary, Chicago, IL (2021). Jia has an upcoming solo exhibition at 12.26 in April 2026. Her work is in the collection of the Brooklyn Museum, New York; Palm Springs Art Museum, California, The Bunker in West Palm Beach, Florida, the H+ Museum in Suzhou, China, and the Zuzeum Art Center in Riga, Latvia.

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