

Tang Contemporary Art presents
Yue Minjun Solo Exhibition - Crab



Yue Minjun, *Guernica: The Grin of War*, Oil on canvas, 300 x 740 cm, 2022

Artist | Yue Minjun
Exhibition Dates | 24 March 2026 — 10 May, 2026
Location | 10/F, H Queen's, 80 Queen's Road Central, Central, Hong Kong

Tang Contemporary Art Hong Kong is pleased to present “Crab”, a solo exhibition by renowned Chinese artist Yue Minjun. The exhibition traces back his artistic journey over the past three decades, systematically showcasing his major series, while unveiling new works that expand his distinctive visual language. Yue Minjun’s artistic practice does not follow a linear path; instead, it moves sideways like a crab — shifting across mediums, repeatedly returning to specific motifs, when maintaining tension among multiple directions. The exhibition “Crab” names this nonlinear, non-unidirectional creative structure, metaphorising how the artist “walks on multiple legs” to break free from a singular perspective, thus, examining artistic creation and social reality through multidimensional exploration.

Since the early 1990s, Yue Minjun has established a highly recognisable visual language through his exaggerated, yet closed laughing figures. This “laugh” has been reproduced and interpreted continuously in the global context, nearly becoming his personal signature. However, focusing solely on the smiling face risks overlooking a more crucial structural trait in his work: a flow of thinking that rejects linear progression and travels sideways like a crab. The logic of multipedal and lateral-propulsion movement defines the true trajectory of Yue Minjun’s decades-long career — he has never adhered to one style, but traverses oil, acrylic, sculpture, printmaking, and other spheres, pacing back and forth between series which form unique rhythm.

The “Treatment Series”, introduced in 1996, represents one of the starting points for this approach. Yue Minjun takes familiar classical images as prototypes, revealing tensions between historical symbols and contemporary interpretations by visual and conceptual dissection. In this exhibition, the “Treatment Series” extends into more collectively oriented “Crowd Series”. Through dense-arranged figures, the artist constructs an allegory of satire and reflection: individual smiling faces are no longer isolated, but intertwined with countless similar persona, implying the intricate relationship between individuals and collectives. Within symbolization and absurdity lies sustained reflection on group psychology and political imagery — both a disenchantment of the sacredness of images, and a transferral of the right to view.

Under Yue Minjun’s artistic treatment, the figure in “Sudden Awakening” has been captured in a moment of compelled backward gazing. This twisting motion occupies a unique place in his oeuvre: unlike the direct gaze of his early “Laughing Face Series” or the deconstruction and reconstruction of classical imagery in “Treatment Series”, “Sudden Awakening” embodies a historical attitude through bodily language.

The sharp twist of the neck mirrors the temporal fragmentation of contemporary individuals: we can neither fully turn our backs on the past nor completely face the future, only looking back repeatedly as we move forward. This posture suggests a way of engagement with history — not surging linearly forward, but being forced to turn back at certain points to cast a gaze upon what has occurred

The “Flower Series”, begun in 2020, shifts this approach to a more intimate dimension. Inspired by garden landscapes in Yunnan, Yue Minjun replaces human faces with blooming or wilting flowers — expressions are obscured, identities concealed. Flowers become new faces, while the original countenances recede into the background. This concealment is not avoidance, but the artist’s choice to substitute human expressions with botanical metaphors of life.

The “Stack Series” further directs attention to the ontology of painting. From the “Luo Series” to the “Stack Series”, unnecessary backgrounds gradually stripped away, figures are driven to the centre, while compositions incline to minimal. This is both an engagement with minimalism

and an inquiry into the essence of painting. “Marvelous Kung Fu” continues the artist’s fascination with exaggerated gestures. In contrast to the collective revelry of his early works, the lone figure in this piece performs an unwatched act in emptiness. This contrast heightens the work’s sense of isolation: any “Marvelous Kung Fu” ultimately remains as a monologue.

The question of “Multifacetedness” raised in multiplicity touches directly on human subjectivity. Humans are never a single-faceted being; “two sides” are merely a simplification of “multi-sides”. Through the splitting and juxtaposition of images, the artist reveals how identity constantly shifts between reality and performance. The motif of “Flight” — from ancient mythology to modern aviation — represents a longed-for ideal. Under Yue Minjun’s pen, “Flight” is no longer a symbol of lightness, ascent, and freedom, but a state of suspension. This may well capture the spiritual condition of contemporary individuals: we yearn to transcend, yet our bodies remain bound by gravity.

Of particular note is the artist’s cross-temporal artistic dialogue with Pablo Picasso. His 2022 work “Guernica: The Grin of War” directly responds to Picasso’s masterpiece “Guernica”. Yue’s iconic laughing figures replace the original imagery, translating Cubism into an eerie and absurd scene. War is no longer purely a historical event, but a persistent shadow of reality. Through mockery, the artist dissolves fear, turning suffering into a bizarre farce, while warning viewers to remain vigilant in the face of catastrophe.

Taken as a whole, the exhibition juxtaposes “Treatment” and “Crowd”, runs “Flower” alongside “Picasso”, and unfolds “Stack” and “Multiface” simultaneously. This parallel structure is exactly the movement of the crab: moving non-linear, holding tension across multiple directions. Yue Minjun’s art grows and intertwines across dimensions, explores the individual and the collective consistently, history and reality, and the politics of the visual. In this sense, “Crab” is more than an exhibition title — it is a description of Yue’s artistic methodology. As viewers weave between series, they encounter not a repetitively grinning face, but a constantly branching, sideways-shifting intellectual trajectory: one that reveals the complexity of humanity and the era between the bizarre and the truth. This, perhaps, is where Yue Minjun’s true contemporaneity lies

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ABOUT ARTIST

Yue Minjun

b. 1962, Heilongjiang, China
Lives and works in Beijing, China

Yue Minjun is a Chinese contemporary artist known for his distinctive use of a laughing self-image, which has become a central motif in his work since the early 1990s. He graduated from Hebei Normal University in 1983 with a degree in oil painting. Over the course of his career, his practice has expanded across multiple mediums, including painting, sculpture, and printmaking. The recurring figure of the ‘laughing man’—often depicted with exaggerated gestures, squinting eyes, and a broad grin—appears both as an isolated individual and as part of collective scenes. This recurring imagery has been widely interpreted as a vehicle for social critique, engaging with themes of irony, absurdity, and the complexities of contemporary life in China.

Yue Minjun's work has been featured in numerous international exhibitions. In 1999, he participated in the 48th Venice Biennale, and has since been invited to contribute to subsequent editions of the Biennale, reflecting his sustained presence in the global contemporary art scene. In 2007, Yue was featured on the cover of *Time* magazine and was named one of the publication's "People Who Mattered" that year. He was the only artist and the only Chinese national included on the list, which also featured international political figures such as Vladimir Putin, Barack Obama, and Hillary Clinton. *Time* described Yue as an artist whose work offers a lens through which to consider China's evolving role in the world.

Yue Minjun's works are held in the collections of major institutions internationally, including the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Denver Art Museum, the Centre Culturel François Mitterrand, the Busan Museum of Art, the Guangdong Museum of Art, and the Shenzhen Art Museum, among others.

ABOUT TANG CONTEMPORARY ART

Tang Contemporary Art was established in 1997 in Bangkok, later establishing galleries in Beijing, Hong Kong, Seoul, and most recently Singapore. We are fully committed to curating critical projects and exhibitions to promote Chinese contemporary art regionally and worldwide and encourage a dynamic exchange between Chinese artists and those abroad. A roster of groundbreaking exhibitions has earned the gallery international recognition, establishing its status as a pioneer of the contemporary art scene in Asia.

Artists represented are diverse in ethnicity and prominence, including leading figures in Chinese contemporary art – Ai Weiwei, Yue Minjun, Huang Yongping, Yin Zhaoyang, Shen Yuan, Wang Du, Liu Xiaodong, Yang Jiechang, Sun Yuan & Peng Yu, Yan Lei, Wang Yin, Wang Yuping, Zheng Guogu, Lin Yilin, He An, Zhao Zhao, Wang Yuyang, Yang Yong, Cai Lei, Zhu Jinshi, Qin Qi, Chen Yujun, and Chen Yufan; and international artists – Julio le Parc, Chun Kwang Young, H.H.Lim, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Sakarin Krue-On, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Adel Abdessemed, Dinh Q. Le, Michael Zelehoski, Jennifer Wen Ma, Rodel Tapaya, Natee Utarit, and Heri Dono.