

FRONTIER ROMANCE

A SOLO EXHIBITION BY YOWSHIEN KUO

November 19, 2021 - December 24, 2021



***Artist Talk and Online Preview with Aleesa Pitchamarn Alexander,
Assistant Curator of American Art at the Cantor Arts Center at Stanford University***

Thursday, November 18, 7 pm ET on Zoom

Register [here](#)

Opening Reception

Friday, November 19 from 5 to 7 pm

(November 10, 2021 -- Brookline, MA) -- Praise Shadows Art Gallery is pleased to present *Frontier Romance*, Yowshien Kuo's first solo exhibition in Boston and his first solo exhibition located outside of the Midwest. Featuring six new paintings, this body of work represents a new direction for the artist in terms of scale and composition. Transitioning to larger canvas sizes, his figures loom larger than ever before, surrounded by fantastical landscapes and skies that blend fiction and exaggerated reality. Simultaneously, Kuo's paintings remain rooted in the artist's deep familiarity with the American West and his Taiwanese heritage, employing motifs, costumes, tattoos, and iconography that blend his worlds to surreal and unexpected means.

The exhibition is on view November 19 through December 24, 2021. An artist's talk and online preview will take place at 7 pm ET on Thursday, November 18 with curator Aleesa Pitchamarn Alexander, Assistant Curator of American Art at the Cantor Arts Center at Stanford University.

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The exhibition's six paintings are a continuation of Kuo's exploration of the entangled psychologies and histories of assimilation into American culture. As in his past work, characteristics of the American West adorn and surround the Asian bodies, an ornamentation that propels the viewer to question who these figures actually are, where they come from, to what land they belong.

According to the artist: "The attempts to assimilate are diverse. There are so many ways in which one can enter into this process, along with a vast array of expected outcomes. Unique as they may be, something is lost in favor of adopted desires. Like all lost objects, there is mourning, only this kind is buried so deep that it is often invisible. The once living is buried in the earth, passing through the ages as bones. Objects lost long ago are forgotten but never gone. Their lingering presence is invisible but always there, similar to stars which can be drenched by light pollution or masked by overcast skies. These metaphors are used to describe the internal conflicts that lay within the multiculturalist individual."

The title *Frontier Romance* references the idealized transition to unexplored territories, whether those territories exist geographically or in an individual's sense of self. U.S. history has institutionalized a romanticized narrative of the Old West at the expense of the laborers and people of color who made the expansion of the country possible. In Kuo's paintings, we look at the "frontier" through a new lens, specifically through the bonded figures often tethered to the landscapes. From this perspective, the romance of forging into uncharted territory is questioned. While we were originally taught Manifest Destiny, we now ponder colonization. While the idealized ruggedness of the American cowboy is ingrained in visual culture, we now see that which was formerly unseen, namely the 15,000 to 20,000 Chinese laborers who built the Transcontinental Railroad.

Kuo deliberately borrows from the practice of bondage, and specifically the Japanese practice of *Shibari*, to express the shame that immigrants might feel towards one's heritage, an experience he borrows from his own upbringing. Yet, look closer. In the painting *The Mourner is Perfectly Content to Kill*, the bonded figure peeks up from beneath his cowboy hat with a hint of ecstasy in their smile. Is this flagellation a form of punishment, or an act of desire? Or are they two sides of the same coin?

A new direction for the artist is the expression of the landscapes and skylscapes. The figures are set within spaces that are neither immediately recognizable nor completely unfamiliar. A celestial plane opens prominently above a warped horizon that zigzags in vibrant blues, pinks, greens. Kuo mixes and creates the pigment to create varying textures of hyperreality. In *Dreams in a Barrel Aimed at the Sky*, synthetic fibers are mixed with white paint to emphasize the fuzzy athletic socks worn by a leaping cowboy. The texture of the socks, though perhaps a small detail, reveal everything about the character: he is playing dress up. His cowboy boots lie beneath him like a prop. Similarly, the celestial skies shine and reflect, the darkness pierced with intensity by the glow of the surface. To achieve this effect, Kuo pours a gloss medium, repeatedly skimming it on the surface of the canvas, and finishes with glitter.

These dreamlike spaces show the internal illuminations of thoughts and emotions. For Kuo's figures, their transition to the ideal life within the American dream has been anything but smooth. Veiled by the gem-like surfaces, costumed in American West regalia, and accessorized throughout with guns, bullets, and tattoos to symbolize the pride of the American spirit, these images expose the prevailing stronghold of who America is meant to look like. These are the holograms of the emotional state that many Asian Americans endure.

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About the artist

Yowshien Kuo was educated in the U.S. and Taiwan, and completed his MFA in 2014. Kuo currently lives and works in St. Louis, Missouri. His experience between both Western and Eastern cultures made it challenging for him to effectively assimilate into either of them. He describes, “My days in Taiwan were filled with studying the arts and the enjoyment of life; in America, the cost of making a comfortable life for myself meant focusing on avoiding being “the other”. My American dreams of fitting in led to shame and embarrassment towards my Asian heritage, and it left me with an inescapable sense of loss that I am constantly working to remedy through my artistic practice.”

His work is positioned to expose wide audiences to the invisible world that exists behind systemic xenophobia and discrimination, and reveal the irony of seemingly innocuous realities faced by multi cultural people. With a goal to humanize and advocate for compassion and empathy towards those who feel a constant sense of disassociation from the circumstances of daily life.

He is a recipient of the 10th Great Rivers Biennial Art Award. As part of that prize, he will open an exhibition at the Contemporary Art Museum in St. Louis in 2022.

In 2021, Kuo had his first museum exhibition at the Contemporary Art Museum in St. Louis, James Fuentes Online (New York, NY), Praise Shadows Art Gallery (Boston, MA), and Art Taipei 2021. His work was been featured on the cover of New American Paintings issue #149. He has been profiled in the Artsy articles, *16 Rising Artist of the Asian Diaspora in the United States*, and *Yowshien Kuo’s Cowboy Paintings Challenge Whitewashed Portrayals of the American West*.

About Praise Shadows LLC

Established in 2020, Praise Shadows Art Gallery is a commercial gallery space in the Boston area showing the work of emerging and mid-career artists.

We believe that the art ecosystem is filled with untapped potential, and our work is grounded by partnering closely with artists to develop opportunities in emerging models of creativity and entrepreneurship — exhibitions, commissions, brand partnerships, new technologies, and original concepts that no one has ever tried before. Praise Shadows Art Partners advises artists and companies in the creative industries on strategic partnerships and marketing. Our work is local, global, and virtual.

www.praiseshadows.com

313A Harvard Street, Brookline, MA 02446

Wednesday - Sunday 11am - 6pm

IMAGE CAPTION: Yowshien Kuo, *The Mourner is Perfectly Content to Kill*, 2021, Acrylic, bone ash, chalk, synthetic fibers, iridescent pigment and glitter on canvas, 24" X 36". Image courtesy Yowshien Kuo and Praise Shadows Art Gallery.

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Exhibition Media Kit [here](#)

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