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- Event:** Yan Pei-Ming: YES!—A Solo Exhibition
- Location:** Walter and McBean Galleries
San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI)
800 Chestnut Street
San Francisco, CA 94133
- Opening reception:** Thursday, 19 February 2009, 5:30–7:30 p.m.
- Visiting Artists and Scholars lecture:**
Thursday, 19 February 2009, 7:30 p.m.
- Cost:** Free and open to the public
- Exhibition Dates:** 20 February–23 May 2009
- Images:** High-resolution digital images available
- Press Contact:** Bob Gamboa, (415) 749-4507, bgamboa@sfai.edu

Yan Pei-Ming: YES!, a Solo Exhibition, Opens at SFAI on 19 February

San Francisco, CA (January 13, 2009)—On Thursday, 19 February, the opening reception for Yan Pei-Ming: YES!—a solo exhibition by the Chinese-born French artist—will be held from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. at the Walter and McBean Galleries on SFAI’s 800 Chestnut Street campus. Immediately following the reception at 7:30 p.m., Yan will deliver his Visiting Artists and Scholars lecture in SFAI’s Lecture Hall (also on the 800 Chestnut Street campus). Free and open to the public (Tuesdays through Saturdays, from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.), the exhibition will be on view from 20 February to 23 May 2009.

Having grown up in Shanghai during the Cultural Revolution of the 60s and 70s, felt the first flickers of the post–Mao Zedong reforms, and then moved to France in 1980 (first to Paris, then to Dijon, where he still lives), Yan Pei-Ming is an apt representative of a generation of global citizens who have at once weathered the alienating mutations of late-twentieth-century geopolitics and relevantly contributed to the ongoing globalization process ensuing upon them.

Indeed, the fact that he has existed and worked at the crossroads of global struggle, both physical and spiritual, is what centrally informs Yan's creative activities.

As if in constant agitation, radiating large, fast strokes that "conquer" the moving ground, Yan's paintings are not so much frozen structures of color and form as literal testaments to the agency inherent in the process by which they are made—a process that is, notwithstanding, persistently haunted by ideologically suffused memories. Primarily using black (sometimes, red) and white to construct an artificial world beyond the "reality" of the full color spectrum, Yan's economical portraits of iconic or historic figures (for example, Mao himself, Pope John Paul II, Bruce Lee, and Barack Obama) are, in the most straightforward sense of the word, *actions*. And, like most actions, these too admit of multiple interpretations.

But the iterating interpretive ambiguity that Yan is able to effect in his portraits is primarily the result of the critically provocative, even politically subversive, painterly force with which he imbues them, thereby deconstructing—as it were, at a stroke—the genre's classic and *prima facie* tendencies toward psychological conservatism, generational continuity, hagiography, and, more recently, celebrity worship. Out-Warholing Warhol in the process, Yan manages to place, as if just over the shoulder of the hesitant-seeming *mein* he in fact depicts, a *doppelgänger* on the verge of a new—and, more often than not, darker—reach of emotion. Such haunting of the self *by* the self—the self as its own semblable—is quite literally brought out in the black-and-white watercolor series of diptychlike facing portraits in which the incumbent self is forced to rub up against the self-elect, its own incoming distractedness and mood. To be sure, in a trenchant reworking of this very series (displayed at the Grand Palais in Paris in October 2008), Yan turns the screw and deconstructs his own oeuvre. By juxtaposing an image of President-elect Obama *not* with another, self-assessing image of Obama himself—as previous such portraits might well have led the beholder to expect—but, rather, with an image of defeated presidential contender John McCain, Yan intimates, as if to concur with those skeptical about the two-party system in the US, that both candidates epitomize merely differential aspects, writ in water, of one another.

Indeed, whether undoing conventionally accepted identities by making visible the logic of their internal differentiation, or demonstrating the ways in which conventionally accepted demarcations disavow all-too-similar similarities, much of Yan's recent work overtly concerns socio- and geopolitical conflict and the related humanistic questions it engenders. Children from economically underdeveloped nations who suffer from brutality, starvation, poverty, and other disasters are poignantly portrayed side by side with UN secretaries-general and soldiers who have fought in the war in Iraq. Finally, as a way to stimulate and increase public awareness, Yan takes his work beyond the conventional museum space and places it—in the form of flags, posters, and various other "outdoor" manifestations—in the public sphere.

Consistent with the curatorial strategies of SFAI's director of Exhibitions and Public Programs, Hou Hanru, Yan Pei-Ming: YES! is coordinated and presented at the intersection of two of the principal components of SFAI's Exhibitions and Public Programs. The first, Global Figures, presents one-person exhibitions of major artists from different cultures who have importantly influenced the current global art scene. The second, Acting Out in the City, utilizes the galleries and spaces of the SFAI campus as points of departure for large-scale projects of urban intervention that conspicuously introduce artistic productions and awareness into public spaces.

Artist Bio

Yan Pei-Ming was born in 1960 in Shanghai, China. He moved to France in 1980 where he quickly became a star on the French painting scene. Now known internationally for his larger-than-life, much-sought portraits of political and cultural icons, he has emerged as one of the most dynamic and experimental Chinese/French painters. His expressive style and controlled palette reflect aesthetic influences from both the Chinese cultural tradition and twentieth-century Western conceptual art. He has had solo exhibitions at such venues as David Zwirner in New York, the Musée d'Art Moderne in Saint-Etienne (France), the Shanghai Art Museum, the Guangdong Museum of Art in Guangzhou (China), Kunsthalle Mannheim (Germany), and the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Dijon (France). Group exhibitions include the 10th International Istanbul Biennial (curated by Hou Hanru), the 2nd International Biennial of Contemporary Art in Seville (Spain) (artistic director, Okwui Enwezor, SFAI's dean of Academic Affairs), the Grand Palais in Paris, the Musée du Luxembourg in Paris, and the 1995 and 2003 Venice Biennials.

SFAI's exhibitions and public programs are supported in part by the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts and the Grants for the Arts/San Francisco Hotel Tax Fund. Yan Pei-Ming: YES! is also supported by Galleria Massimo De Carlo in Milan and David Zwirner in New York.

San Francisco Art Institute

Founded in 1871, SFAI is one of the oldest and most prestigious schools of higher education in contemporary art in the US. Focusing on the interdependence of thinking, making, and learning, SFAI's academic and public programs are dedicated to excellence and diversity.

SFAI's School of Studio Practice concentrates on developing the artist's vision through studio experiments and is based on the belief that artists are an essential part of society. It offers a BFA, an MFA, and a Post-Baccalaureate certificate in Design and Technology, Film, New Genres, Painting, Photography, Printmaking, and Sculpture/Ceramics.

SFAI's School of Interdisciplinary Studies is motivated by the premise that critical thinking and writing, informed by an in-depth understanding of theory and practice, are essential for engaging contemporary global society. It offers degree programs in Exhibition and Museum Studies (MA only), History and Theory of Contemporary Art (BA and MA), and Urban Studies (BA and MA).

Ideally designed for the student who wants a deep and balanced immersion at once in theoretical discourse and in art practice is SFAI's Dual Degree MA/MFA program. A three-year commitment, the degree consists in an MA in History and Theory of Contemporary Art and an MFA in any area of study within the School of Studio Practice.

For more information about this exhibition and other public or academic programs at SFAI, please go to www.sfai.edu or call 415 749 4563.