

龙年 YEAR OF THE DRAGON

*Shaun Daniel Allen (Shal) / Fan Dongwang / WeiZen Ho
Jacquie Meng / Sin Wai Kin / Thirteen Feet Tattoo Studio / Yang Yongliang*

Curated by Con Gerakaris.

The dragon, the fifth sign in the zodiac cycle, holds a significant place in Chinese mythology, particularly the tale of the Jade Emperor and the four dragons. This creation story tells the tale of how the Mountain God trapped each dragon in a mountain prison, of which sprang forth the Yellow, Yangtze, Heilong and Pearl Rivers. From their divine actions, dragons occupy a space of heavenly reverence, with those born under this sign said to be earthly connections to a celestial realm.

YEAR OF THE DRAGON [龙年] presents new and existing artworks that peek into this domain of gods, remaking ancient tales of benevolent deities and divining rituals through contemporary art practice. We see these reimagined dragons in the illustrations of **Fan Dongwang** which blend aesthetic influences of traditional Chinese symbology and Western modern art movements. The dragon is also reinterpreted by **Tom Baker, Dennis Enrile, Fernando Hideki, Camilo L, Chalida McKelvie, Kevin Nguyen, @supsitt.tattoo** and **@32tattoo**, artists from **Thirteen Feet Tattoo Haymarket** studio. Their collective fabric and tattoo stencil installation reflect on the transformative ritual of giving and receiving a tattoo and presents the range of stylistic expressions in the medium.

Artists **WeiZen Ho** and **Sin Wai Kin** use their body and performance to create a bridge between physical and spiritual spaces, offering considerations of soothsaying and meditation practices. **Shaun Daniel Allen (Shal)** echoes creation myths with impressions of Bundjalung waterways, an eternal font of inspiration, while **Yang Yongliang** creates digitally-composed imaginary landscapes stemming from classical shan shui paintings. The idea of parallel universes is continued in the work of **Jacquie Meng** who visualises herself in a self-conjured reality where the past and present collide into vivid daydreams.

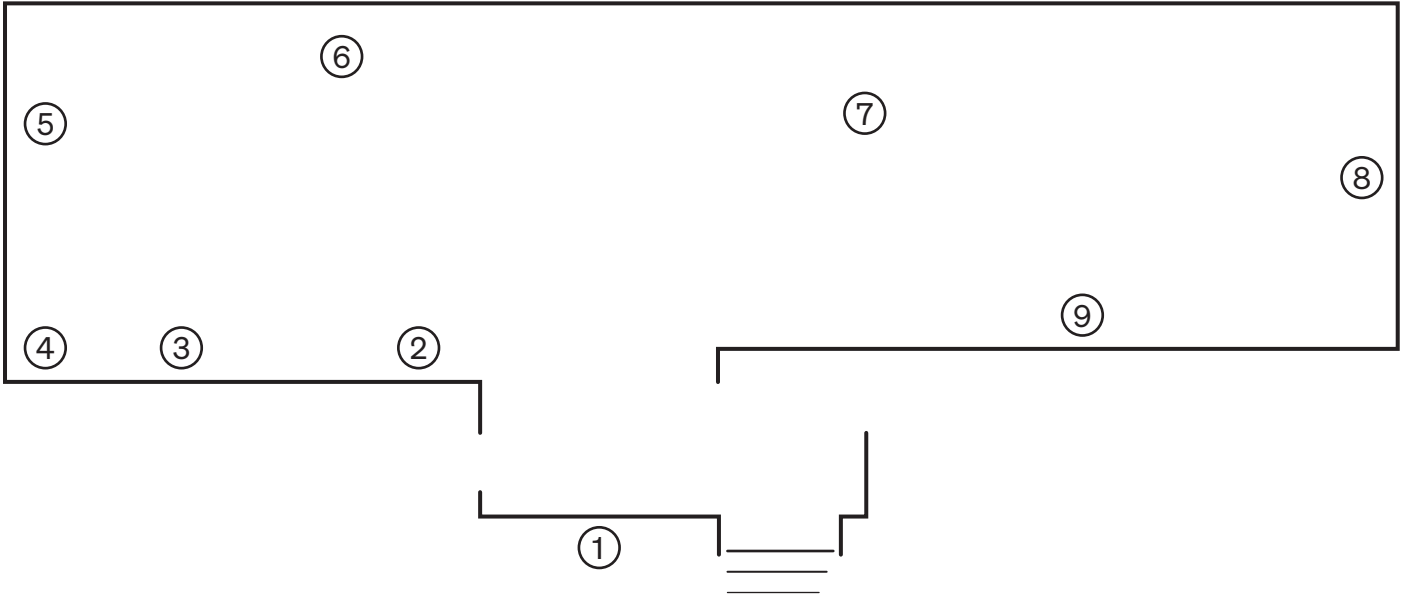
YEAR OF THE DRAGON [龙年] makes visible a world beyond, offering a chance to visit the divine realm and be reborn for the new year.

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① **Tom Baker, Dennis Enrile, Fernando Hideki, Camilo L, Chalida McKelvie, Kevin Nguyen, @supsitt.tattoo and @32tattoo**
Ascension, 2024
 Digital print on voile fabric

Rite of Passage, 2024
 Thermal paper tattoo stencils

Courtesy the artists and Thirteen Feet Tattoo, Haymarket

Commissioned by 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art.
 Supported by The City of Sydney's Festivals and Events Sponsorship 2024 Grant Program

② **Shaun Daniel Allen (Shal)**
C.F.C., 2022/23
 Synthetic polymer on canvas

Courtesy the artist and China Heights, Sydney

③ **Yang Yongliang 杨泳梁**
Early Spring, 2019
 Giclée print on fine art paper
 Edition 3/7

Courtesy the artist and the collection of Denwol Group Pty Ltd

④ **Yang Yongliang 杨泳梁**
Infinite Landscape, 2011
 Video animation (black and white, sound), 7m 23s
 Edition 7/7

Courtesy the artist and White Rabbit Collection, Sydney

Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by Judith Neilson
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⑤ **Jacque Meng**
Big Pendulum Swinging, 2024
 Oil on canvas

Courtesy the artist and Stanley Street Gallery, Sydney

Commissioned by 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art.
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⑥ **WeiZen Ho**
Amulet Body, 2024
 Mixed media installation

Costume by Jennifer H Chua and Tania Castaing

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⑦ **Shaun Daniel Allen (Shal)**
E.P.B., 2023
 Foraged flora extraction and acrylic on linen

Courtesy the artist and China Heights, Sydney

⑧ **Sin Wai Kin**
The One, 2021
 Single-channel video, stereo sound, 10m 0s
 Edition of 5 +2AP

Courtesy the artist and Blindspot Gallery, Hong Kong

⑨ **Fan Dongwang**
Dragon in Water #1 - #6, 2019
 Pencil on paper

Courtesy the artist and Art Atrium, Sydney

Dr Fan (project) is supported by the NSW Government through Create NSW

Tom Baker, Dennis Enrile, Fernando Hideki, Camilo L, Chalida McKelvie, Kevin Nguyen,
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Tattoo has existed throughout diverse cultural, social and geographic groups of humanity for thousands of years, a visual lexicon for telling stories and marking community relationships. The two works presented by the artists at Thirteen Feet Tattoo, Haymarket explore two different sides of the artform and demonstrate the artistic depth and aesthetic inventiveness of contemporary practice. Nowhere is this more evident than *Rite of Passage (2024)*, an installation composed of stencils used in the transferral process before inking. As practical objects, these stencils are artefacts of the ritual of tattooing and form an intimate experience that reaffirms the trusting relationship between artist and canvas.

Tattoo is a transformative act that often reflects great personal change. This concept of transformation is embodied in *Ascension (2024)*, a bespoke illustration suspended in the stairwell depicting a dragon soaring to the heavens. As this entity welcomes us into the exhibition we rise alongside them into a new state of consciousness and are reborn with the new year, offering endless pathways into the future. Which path do we choose? Just like the ultimately wise dragon—who embodies strength and hidden knowledge—we will know which path to take. The answer is clear: always look to the heavens.

Shaun Daniel Allen (Shal)

C.F.C., 2022/23
Synthetic polymer on canvas

E.P.B., 2023
Foraged flora extraction and acrylic on linen

Courtesy the artist and China Heights, Sydney

In Chinese mythology, four dragons disobeyed the Jade Emperor, transforming into the great rivers and providing a prosperous source of life to the land. As a signature motif in the work of Shaun Daniel Allen (Shal), the balun (Yugambeh-Bundjalung for 'river') represents both a source of life and connection to Country. *C.F.C. (2022/23)* references a specific shade of ochre found on Bundjalung land, a bespoke shade of purple which Shal expands into a multitude of hues. Contrasted against shades of green extracted from macaranga foliage, the work layers several applications of both green and purple colour schemes as our eyes trace the tributaries and estuaries along the riverbanks of the canvas.

E.P.B. (2023) demonstrates another side of Shal's work, a slower artistic process which combines his painterly practice with dying techniques. Under the tutelage of Aunty Rose, a master weaver and Elder from Milingimbi—the largest of the Crocodile Islands off the West Arnhem Land coast—Shal incorporates dyes from boiled down coconut husks and roots alongside inks extracted from native leaves and flowers into his established methodology. *E.P.B.* traces the artist's deep immersion on Country, gathering practical knowledge and cultural understanding with an almost autobiographical purpose.

Yang Yongliang 杨泳梁
Early Spring, 2019
Giclée print on fine art paper
Edition 3/7

Courtesy the artist and the collection of
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Yang Yongliang reconfigures iconic works from the past through photography and moving image, recomposing classical landscapes with a collage of everyday urban environments and digitally manipulated natural elements. Shan shui—traditional ink and brush landscape—paintings strive not to depict a perfect replica of a vista, but rather the artist's complete and spiritual experience of nature. Coming to the fore during the Song Dynasty (960–1279), this artform produced some of the most widely-known cultural images from China, with their influence trickling down into contemporary society to this day. Yang's *Early Spring* (2019) directly references the Guo Xi work of the same name, painted in 1072. The artist captures the verdant energy of Guo's lithe brushstrokes in crisp high-definition digital photography, offering an uncanny interpretation of this imagined vista.

Infinite Landscape (2011) shows us a bustling metropolis of spaghetti junctions and mountains built of high density apartment complexes evoking the unending urban sprawl of China's megacities. This moving image work alludes to the common vertical scroll format, and compositionally echoes shan shui masterpieces of untamed wild mountain ranges. However, Yang uncomfortably replaces pine forests and flowing streams for tower cranes and elevated highways, where construction noise drowns out moments of introspective solitude as we navigate the insatiable desire for higher quality in our modern lives.

Jacquie Meng
Big Pendulum Swinging, 2024
Oil on canvas

Courtesy the artist and Stanley Street Gallery, Sydney

Commissioned by 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art.
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Jacquie Meng seeks to twist the meaning and purpose of self-portraiture, appearing as a caricatured avatar often performing mundane activities in extraordinary imagined locations. Her works are littered with cultural and everyday objects, recreated not from personal paraphernalia but generic products found through online shops and image searches. It is through these objects we are brought into Meng's playfully surrealistic worlds within which the artist meditates on concepts of spirituality, cultural rituals and the passage of time.

In Big Pendulum Swinging (2024) we see a giant Newton's cradle in motion, each metallic sphere reflecting the artist's face as they swing back and forth. For Meng this device represents the unending momentum of time, an impartial natural force which humanity has mathematically subdivided into increments great and small. Within the work are several references to cycles of time: the sunset signifying a natural division of time alongside double helix spiral staircases suggesting an endless journey. Balancing precariously we see Meng's avatar joyfully at play yet painted ghostly translucent white with incense burners perched upon their sternum. This suggests that while metaphysical worlds are always surrounding us, we must take time and undertake personal rituals to access the realm beyond reality.

WeiZen Ho

Amulet Body, 2024

Mixed media installation

Costume by Jennifer H Chua and Tania Castaing

Commissioned by 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art.

Supported by The City of Sydney's Festivals and Events

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Amulet Body (2024) is a performance installation that deconstructs and reimagines systems of divination and sacred-word protection. The work synthesises material symbolism, the body and participatory choreographic methods to expand and loosen imaginative space, thus creating a dynamistic environment. Ho exposes the machinations of divination, suggesting such rituals are not about certainty but rather exist as a system of techniques responding to physical and spiritual patterns in the world.

The central performance of *Amulet Body* incorporates a set of 150 wooden spindles housing a handwritten note containing a thought, koan of provocation. During the artist's performance, audience members are encouraged to take a spindle and privately consider the note, either challenging the text or dutifully following the instructions. The spindle is then attached to the artist as she performs a ritualistic procession, assuming the role of a cosmic diviner among a makeshift procession of devoted followers. *Amulet Body* is a study of divination, an intriguing and complex phenomenon revolving around concepts of belief, faith and intuition, activated during Lunar New Year, a time traditionally associated with rebirth and fortune telling.

Sin Wai Kin

The One, 2021

Single-channel video, stereo sound, 10m 0s Edition of 5 +2AP

Courtesy the artist and Blindspot Gallery, Hong Kong

Sin Wai Kin uses performance, moving image, writing and print to create pieces of speculative fiction that disrupt the status quo in how we perceive and process societal change. Sin embodies fantastical characters through drag to become twisted figures of desire which tread the fine line between self-identification and objectification. Sin's constructed narratives expose cultural tropes of idol worship, media personalities and class through the lens of the queer body.

The One (2021) shows Sin deep in meditation, eyes shut, stationery, breathing. With the sun disk as a third eye, the outline of the body is relocated to the face, and the mouth stands in for every orifice, redefining and eroticising the limits of the body. There is no more division between self and world, mind and body, individual and context.

Fan Dongwang

Dragon in Water #1 - #6, 2019

Pencil on paper

Courtesy the artist and Art Atrium, Sydney

Dr Fan (project) is supported by the NSW Government through Create NSW.

When Fan Dongwang migrated to Australia in 1990 he sought to 'disintegrate' his Chinese identity through a painterly study of the body, from a multitude of perspectives introduced by his integration in Western cultural society. Fan's signature style draws from his education in traditional Chinese art and sees a reinvention of these skills through encounters with modernist art movements and interactions with a diverse group of peers. His acrylic on canvas sculptural paintings reference Chinese decorative carvings in their visual depth but are rendered with flat brushwork and bright colours influenced by hard-edge abstraction, op art and the pop art movements.

His *Dragon in Water* series (2019) moves away from his painting practice and shows us six celestial beings living in water rather than the traditional heavenly body of the sky. For Fan, aquatic environments represent a catalyst for change, where one is submerged, cleansed and transformed into a new entity. These dragons are symbolic not only of the artist's personal growth, but a reflection on contemporary Chinese identity, increasingly hybridised by western capitalist models and an emergence as a global superpower; with Fan navigating his past life in Shanghai and how the past bleeds into his current life in Sydney.