

# Susan Hobbs

## Yan Wen Chang

2015 B.F.A. Drawing and Painting, Ontario College of Art and Design, Toronto  
2022 M.F.A. Studio Art, University of Guelph, Guelph

## Selected Solo Exhibitions

2022 *Four Hollywood Paintings*, X in Residency, Toronto  
*A. Dream*, General Hardware, Toronto  
2018 *The Life of Vanda Miss Joaquim*, Pushmi Pullyu, Toronto

## Selected Group Exhibitions

2022 *Art/Craft Annual Auction*, The Art Gallery of Guelph, Guelph  
*Piers*, UVic Legacy Gallery, Victoria  
*The size of a credit card*, the plumb, Toronto  
*Temporary Collection 2022*, Ed Video, Guelph  
2021 *hollywood: Yan Wen Chang, Sam Cheroof, Robbie McDonald*, A.D., NYC, New York  
2019 *The Bald Eagle's Claw*, curated by Philip Ocampo, Xpace Cultural Centre,  
Toronto  
*Xpace Annual Fundraiser 2019*, Xpace Cultural Centre, Toronto  
2018 *Come Up To My Room (CUTMR)*, in collaboration with Sister Co-Resister and  
Pamila Matharu, curated by Vince Rozarino, The Gladstone Hotel, Toronto  
*I was categorical, and so, defiant*, curated by Lucas Regazzi, AKA Artist Run  
Centre, Saskatoon  
2017 *No creature can learn that which his heart has no shape to hold*, Wil Kucey Gallery,  
Toronto  
2016 *What Would the Community Think?*, Xpace Cultural Centre, Toronto  
*Fresh Paint/New Construction*, Art Mûr, Montreal

## Bibliography

Adams, Kelsey. *10 Toronto visual artists to watch in 2021*. NOW Magazine, 5 August 2021;  
Caton, Hillary. *Parkdale artist Yan Wen Chang explores city signage at the City of Art exhibit*.  
Toronto.com. 16 November 2015;  
Callander Angel. *The Asian American Dream: In Conversation with Yan Wen Chang*. Blackflash, 3  
December 2022.

Susan Hobbs Gallery Inc.  
137 Tecumseth Street  
Toronto, Canada M6J 2H2  
Telephone 416 504 3699  
Faesimile 416 504 8064

**ARTIST OF THE WEEK****Yan Wen Chang**

November 1, 2022

[@yanwen\\_\\_\\_\\_chang](#)  
[yanwenchang.com](#)

Yan Wen Chang (b. 1993) immigrated to Toronto, alone, from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in 2011 at the age of 17. Chang holds an MFA in Studio Art from the School of Fine Art and Music at the University of Guelph since July 2022 and received her BFA in Drawing and Painting at the Ontario College of Art and Design University in 2015. She was Canadian visual artist Robert Fones' studio and painting assistant for three years. Chang has shown solo exhibitions at X in Residency (Toronto), General Hardware Contemporary (Toronto), and Pushmi Pullyu (Toronto), and has been included in group exhibitions at A.D. NYC (New York), and the plumb (Toronto). Chang's 33-foot public billboard entitled "same problem my father had and what he dreamed" is currently on display at Hamilton Artists' Inc.'s Cannon Project Wall until May 2023. Her work is included in the collections of The Royal Bank of Canada, Toronto-Dominion Bank, the Art Gallery of Guelph as well as of private collectors'. Chang's forthcoming solo exhibition "The Headlights were Stars" will be presented at Susan Hobbs Gallery (Toronto) in Jan 2023. (Portrait Photo Credit: Jessann Reece)



**Susan Hobbs Gallery Inc.**  
137 Tecumseth Street  
Toronto, Canada M6J 2H2  
Telephone 416 504 3699  
Facsimile 416 504 8064

**Tell us a bit about yourself and what you do.**

I make paintings about the American Dream.

I grew up in Kuala Lumpur under dangerously patriarchal and corrupt conditions as a young woman. For as long as I can remember, I had always desired to escape hardships in my homeland. In addition, I was equally determined to achieve a level of success that could not be realised at home. I translocated to North America in 2011 to fulfill my dream of becoming an artist.

I refer to the American Dream as a concept that is not defined geographically by the U.S.A., but to one that describes the passion, obsession, desire and sacrifice to translocate to the West as a means of survival and a 'better life'.

In my paintings, I investigate and critique the two opposite, yet coexisting realities of the dream – one that is hopeful and defiant, and the other as hopeless and desperate.



Gray Star Painting No. 1 | Oil on canvas | 38" X 38" | 2022

**Can you talk about text in your work?**

I was a studio assistant for Canadian visual artist Robert Fones for three years before starting my MFA.

Working for Fones' introduced me to a world of text-based painting. Edward Ruscha, John Baldessari and Raymond Pettibon became heroes to me. I taught myself how to pinstripe car parts and paint letters traditionally with One Shot enamel paint. For my paintings, I mix oil paint with a specific ratio of linseed oil and mineral spirits so that the viscosity of my oil paint is similar to that of One Shot's, so I can paint text easily onto raw canvas on the edges of my paintings

Text sometimes appears on the edges of my painting as the title of my painting as well as my initials and the year the painting was made. I am attracted to the LED lights of bodegas and convenience stores, specifically the ones that have scrolling text like: "ATM HERE... 24/7... SEVEN DAYS A WEEK... OPEN... WELCOME....." I stand in front of a scrolling text LED sign and wait for the message to end, and it never seems like it does.

The text on the edges of my paintings is evocative of this experience. You read the text on one edge, and you try to see if you can follow the text around all four edges of the painting. But seldom anyone gets to see the top and the bottom of the painting's edges as the top is too high to see and the bottom is too low to the ground. The mystery of the text never fully reveals itself and the text feels like it's never ending. You only get to see a part of it before you move on.

**Susan Hobbs Gallery Inc.**  
 137 Tecumseth Street  
 Toronto, Canada M6J 2H2  
 Telephone 416 504 3699  
 Facsimile 416 504 8064



Portrait of Self in Passenger Seat No. 8 | Oil on canvas | 58" X 40" | 2021

#### What do you collect?

Lighters.

For clarification, I do not pocket lighters or steal them when I borrow one from a stranger or a friend to light a cigarette – I buy full trays of lighters from my favourite bodegas in Toronto. I buy individual ones too, but also mostly from bodegas.

I am not particular about brand. I look out for special colour combinations, or an interesting design.

My favourite lighter has an image of Tiger Woods playing golf. The colour saturation of the image is perfect. There is an ultramarine blue sky and a phthalo emerald/sap green field. Tiger Woods' golf shirt is a naphthol red and he is wearing titanium white pants. Nothing on the lighter indicates that the man golfing is actually Tiger Woods.



Installation photograph of "A. Dream", Chang's MFA thesis exhibition at General Hardware Contemporary (Toronto), 2022

**Susan Hobbs Gallery Inc.**  
 137 Tecumseth Street  
 Toronto, Canada M6J 2H2  
 Telephone 416 504 3699  
 Facsimile 416 504 8064

### How do you situate yourself in contemporary painting?

I keep making paintings because my next painting could be my best painting.

Helen Frankenthaler, in an interview with Cindy Nemser, said that the only way she could judge a good painting was to take the picture and hang it on a wall with others. Hearing her talk about this was liberating for me.

I recently read the essay "Second Nature" by Paul Chan where he writes about freedom, and that art has the capability of cheating fate. Fate, here, means the order of things or the weight of a past that directs how something is valued, how a place is treated and where something belongs.

Art cheats fate when an artwork's "interior, or composition [...] acts like an echo chamber [when] visual and conceptual elements enter a composition [...] [They] are deprived of their social bearings and become unmoored from the historical determinations that ground them in intelligible reality." (Chan, 151)

The proposition is this: an artwork is capable of "[loosening] the grip social reality holds to those elements and frees them from their fate, their pre-existing functions and meanings. They lose their place in the order of things, which enables them to relate and belong in ways that are neither predictable nor predetermined. It creates new relationships out of what already exists as a reminder of what is still possible." (Chan, 151)

It's like running a 100-metre race. You invest a tremendous amount of hard work and time in preparing for the race. Then when it's time, you run. You race. You paint.

You are given the opportunity to cheat fate. Sometimes you come in first and other times you are a loser. Regardless of the outcome, you start preparing for the next race.

### How do stars function in your work?

In my Star Paintings, I paint the same sized five-pointed star to conceal as much canvas as possible. Sometimes I choose to conceal the entire surface completely with stars, and in others I allow light from the raw canvas itself or painted colours in the background to fight to the surface. The five-pointed star is a loaded subject in my work that abstracts the traditional symbolism of the star in the traditional American Dream to express my painting as a materialist impulse and a sensitivity to the pure haecceity of the star. The five-pointed star is a reoccurring symbol in my paintings that signifies desire, success, and greatness.



Black Star Painting No. 1 | Oil on canvas | 40" X 40" | 2021-22

**Susan Hobbs Gallery Inc.**  
137 Tecumseth Street  
Toronto, Canada M6J 2H2  
Telephone 416 504 3699  
Facsimile 416 504 8064

**I am interested in the 'Car-gray' palette that you use in a lot of your works – could you speak to that?**

In my paintings, I custom-mix numerous black oil paints. I use titanium white oil paint, but straight from its tube. I think black and white is a good stand-in for the two disparate realities of the American Dream—one hopeful, and the other hopeless.

I work with a lot of grays now, and I mix some red and blue into those grays. Gray for me means living in the in-between space held by that opposition of the two realities.

I am working with steel now to build frames for my new paintings. My studio in Toronto used to be an auto shop, so my interest in steel as a material came from my surroundings in that studio. I do like mixing grays evocative of steel. I also look at Jasper Johns' gray American Flag paintings as reference for mixing my grays.

The car is an important symbol in my paintings for the American Dream. In my Portrait of Self in Passenger Seat paintings, I reduce my self-portrait into a smile and a pair of slanted eyes accentuated with eye-liner which appear as reflections in the rear and side-view mirrors and windows of the car. I position myself sitting in the front passenger seat, never the one driving or in control of the destination.

**What does it mean for a painting to describe itself, especially in the way you title your paintings and how text appears in your work?**

I am interested in the reflections of things in mirrors. I make paintings of images of reflections of things.

In my Portrait of Self in Passenger Seat paintings, I insert myself into the painting, as the self-portrait, but the self-portrait only emerges as a reflection in the mirrors and the windows of the car.

I reference old psychoanalytic theory where one can confirm their own existence by looking at the mirror where the reflection of oneself (image of oneself) is an assurance that they are present in the world, that they are here, and they exist. However, the reflection of the self in the mirror is simply only an image, and in my paintings I paint reflections of the self (I am painting images of the images of the self), so the self-portrait gets pushed further and further away from the viewer's immediate contact with the painting.

I title my paintings "Black Star Painting No. 1", or "Gray Star Painting No 1.4", or "Portrait of Self in Passenger Seat No. 14 with Pair of Dice" so that the titles not only describe the reality of what the work is, but also evokes the experience of assuring its own existence in the world.

It's like my Gray Star Painting No. 1.4 painting looking at itself in the mirror and saying to itself "Gray Star Painting No. 1.4" to make sure that it knows it's there.



**Susan Hobbs Gallery Inc.**  
 137 Tecumseth Street  
 Toronto, Canada M6J 2H2  
 Telephone 416 504 3699  
 Facsimile 416 504 8064

**What have you been listening to recently?**

Tracy Chapman – Fast Car

Leon Bridges – Coming Home

The Weeknd, Lana Del Rey – Stargirl Interlude

**Do you have any upcoming projects you can share with us?**

My solo exhibition of new paintings “The Headlights were Stars” will be presented at Susan Hobbs Gallery (Toronto, Canada) from 19 Jan to 25 Feb 2023.

Interview Conducted by Milo Christie

**Susan Hobbs Gallery Inc.**  
137 Tecumseth Street  
Toronto, Canada M6J 2H2  
Telephone 416 504 3699  
Facsimile 416 504 8064

## YAN WEN CHANG

### BIOGRAPHY

Yan Wen Chang (b. 1993) immigrated to Toronto, alone, from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in 2011 at the age of 17. Chang holds an MFA in Studio Art from the School of Fine Art and Music at the University of Guelph since July 2022 and received her BFA in Drawing and Painting at OCAD University in 2015. She was Robert Fones' studio and painting assistant for three years.

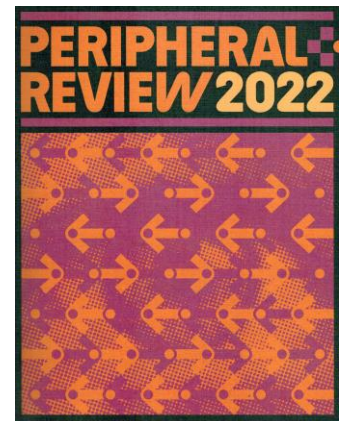
Chang has shown solo exhibitions at X in Residency (Toronto), General Hardware Contemporary (Toronto), and Pushmi Pullyu (Toronto), and has been included in group exhibitions at A.D. NYC (New York), and the plumb (Toronto). Chang's 33-foot public billboard entitled "same problem my father had and what he dreamed" is currently on display at Hamilton Artists Inc.'s Cannon Project Wall until May 2023. Her work is included in the collections of The Royal Bank of Canada, Toronto-Dominion Bank, the Art Gallery of Guelph, as well as in private collections. Chang's forthcoming solo exhibitions include Susan Hobbs Gallery (Toronto) in January 2023.

### STATEMENT

I grew up in Kuala Lumpur under dangerously patriarchal and corrupt conditions as a young woman. I desired to escape hardships in my homeland. I was equally determined to achieve a level of success that could not be realized at home. I translocated to North America in 2011 to fulfill my dream of becoming an artist.

My current work is entitled 'A. Dream,' where 'A' represents 'American.' I investigate the acculturation of the dream, as it relates particularly to immigrant life. I refer to the American Dream as a concept that is not defined geographically by the U.S.A., but to one that describes the passion, obsession, desire and sacrifice to translocate to the West as a means of survival and 'better life.' My paintings explore the two opposite, yet coexisting realities of the dream – one that is hopeful and the other as hopeless.

In my *Star Paintings*, I paint the same sized five-pointed star to conceal as much canvas as possible. In my *Portrait of Self* paintings, I reduce my self-portrait into a smile and a pair of slanted eyes accentuated with eye-liner which appear as reflections in the rear and side-view mirrors and windows of the car. I position myself sitting in the front passenger seat, never the one driving or in control of the destination. In my *Hollywood* paintings, I paint the Hollywood Nails Salon sign on Dundas Street West in Toronto. By painting this sign, I collapse the real and the imagined meanings of Hollywood, a stand-in for desire and longing.







↖ *Star Painting 1.5*  
2022  
Oil on canvas  
11 x 14 inches  
Yan Wen Chang

↑ *Hollywood*  
2022  
Gouache on canvas  
11 x 14 inches  
Yan Wen Chang

**Susan Hobbs Gallery Inc.**  
137 Tecumseth Street  
Toronto, Canada M6J 2H2  
Telephone 416 504 3699  
Facsimile 416 504 8064



Susan Hobbs Gallery Inc.  
137 Tecumseth Street  
Toronto, Canada M6J 2H2  
Telephone 416 504 3699  
Facsimile 416 504 8064



OPPOSITE PAGE:  
← *Portrait of Self in Passenger Seat No. 110*  
2021  
Oil on canvas  
46 x 40 inches  
Yan Wen Chang

✓ *Portrait of Self in Passenger Seat No. 8*  
2021  
Oil on canvas  
58 x 40 inches  
Yan Wen Chang

THIS PAGE:  
← *Portrait of Self in Passenger Seat No. 8*  
Edge detail  
2021  
Oil on canvas  
58 x 40 inches  
Yan Wen Chang

✓ (Left-Right)  
*Grey Star Painting No. 1.4*  
2022  
Oil on canvas  
11 x 14 inches  
Yan Wen Chang

*Grey Star Painting No. 1.3*  
2022  
Oil on canvas  
11 x 14 inches  
Yan Wen Chang



# THE ASIAN AMERICAN DREAM: IN CONVERSATION WITH YAN WEN CHANG

By Angel Callander

**YAN WEN CHANG IS AN ARTIST IN TORONTO** from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, whose work—influenced by her experience of moving to Canada alone at age 17—takes a critical look at the concept of the American Dream and its two-fold hopefulness and disillusionment. Her paintings use limited colour palettes and hard-edge techniques to explore autobiographical experiences of translocating to the West from Southeast Asia, parsing the many factors that make up the immigrant experience within a complex matrix of Western culture—including survival, success, belonging, and family histories.

In addition to her practice as a painter, Chang's artistic output has taken many forms, from mixed-media installation to video and fashion (such as *Yan's Revenge*, 2020, ongoing), she emphasizes her materials in relation to commodity, "authenticity," and capital circulation. Chang's recent exhibition at Toronto's the plumb titled "The size of a credit card" features replicas of Marcel Breuer's "Wassily" chair, a customized Hennessy bottle filled with motor oil and a white rose, and a text-based mural. These works seem disparate but are united in their reference points through various aspects of American culture and Chang's own personal life.

In this conversation, we discuss Chang's new body of paintings, *A Dream*, produced during her MFA; some of her art historical influences; the concept of the Asian American Dream; the importance of ancestral narratives; her love of the replica; and how her "outsider" perspective on American culture is ripe for producing "mismatched" assemblages that speak to the ways information is disseminated throughout the world.

**ANGEL CALLANDER:** You came to Toronto from Malaysia by yourself at 17, and it seems like this experience of coming to North America informs a lot of the larger concepts that you work with. What led you to making such a huge move?

**YAN WEN CHANG:** I came to North America specifically because Malaysia was very patriarchal, and very dangerous for a young woman growing up. As long as I can remember, I had the intuition to go somewhere else.

**pg. 30:** Yan Wen Chang, *Pair of replica customized Wassily Chairs*, 2022.

Chair No. 1: Marcel Breuer Model B3 Wassily Chair replica steel chrome frame purchased on Kijiji in 2018 for \$99CAN, then electroplated with 24 Karat Gold in 2022. The seat is made of five unstretched paintings by Chang. The paintings are titled as follows: *Portrait of Self in Passenger Seat No. 1*, 2022, oil on canvas; *Big Dreams*, 2020, gouache on denim; *Take Away My Pain, I Regret I Told Mama Life Would Change*, 2018, mixed media on canvas; *Home, Exile, and Return*, 2018, mixed media on canvas; *You Can't Play God Without Being Acquainted With The Devil*, 2017, mixed media on canvas. All parts of the seat were hand-stitched with a black cotton embroidery thread.

Chair No. 2: Black leather seat Marcel Breuer Model B3 Wassily Chair replica chair stolen from Chang's ex-boyfriend in 2018.

Installation documentation of "The size of the credit card" group exhibition curated by Daniel Griffin Hunt at the plumb (Toronto) from April 1 to April 29, 2022. Image courtesy of the artist and the plumb. Photo by Laura Findlay Documentation.

**Susan Hobbs Gallery Inc.**  
137 Tecumseth Street  
Toronto, Canada M6J 2H2  
Telephone 416 504 3699  
Facsimile 416 504 8064

**AC:** Did you have any notions of becoming an artist?

**YWC:** I didn't have any major art education in high school and never thought about being an artist. But I knew I wanted to be free to do something that I wasn't necessarily supposed to be doing. I got into OCADU, and I worked for Robert Fones from 2014. His practice was formally very influential on me.

This dream of immigration and translocation to the West, or to North America, informs why I paint. I talk about my mother being back home while I'm here; finding the meaning of home; and asking myself, where do I actually belong in this city? I have a very deep, disciplined work ethic. There's no option but to succeed.

Coming here by myself was really hard. I struggled with addiction up until my MFA, which was because of this experience of coming to a new place alone, not feeling like you belong, and the pockets of people that do accept you are not always the right ones. You try to be free and think everything is going to be great, but it's not what you expected. That's the dark part of the American Dream—thinking things are gonna open up for you, and sometimes it's so disappointing.

**AC:** Coming to Toronto, instead of somewhere like New York, is interesting in terms of working so heavily with the American Dream. It's assumed to be a US-centric concept, but it's not: it's actually completely North American.

**YWC:** Exactly. And I think of it more like the Asian American Dream. I feel like when we talk about the traditional American Dream—"life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness"—everybody does have a right to those things. Survival is guaranteed, and it's more about how you thrive. Whereas for me, the Asian American Dream is about pursuing survival first. Finding a level of prosperity and success that you can't achieve at home is secondary.

**AC:** You do have this acknowledgement, in your work, that the American Dream is a double-edged sword, being aspirational but ultimately disappointing.

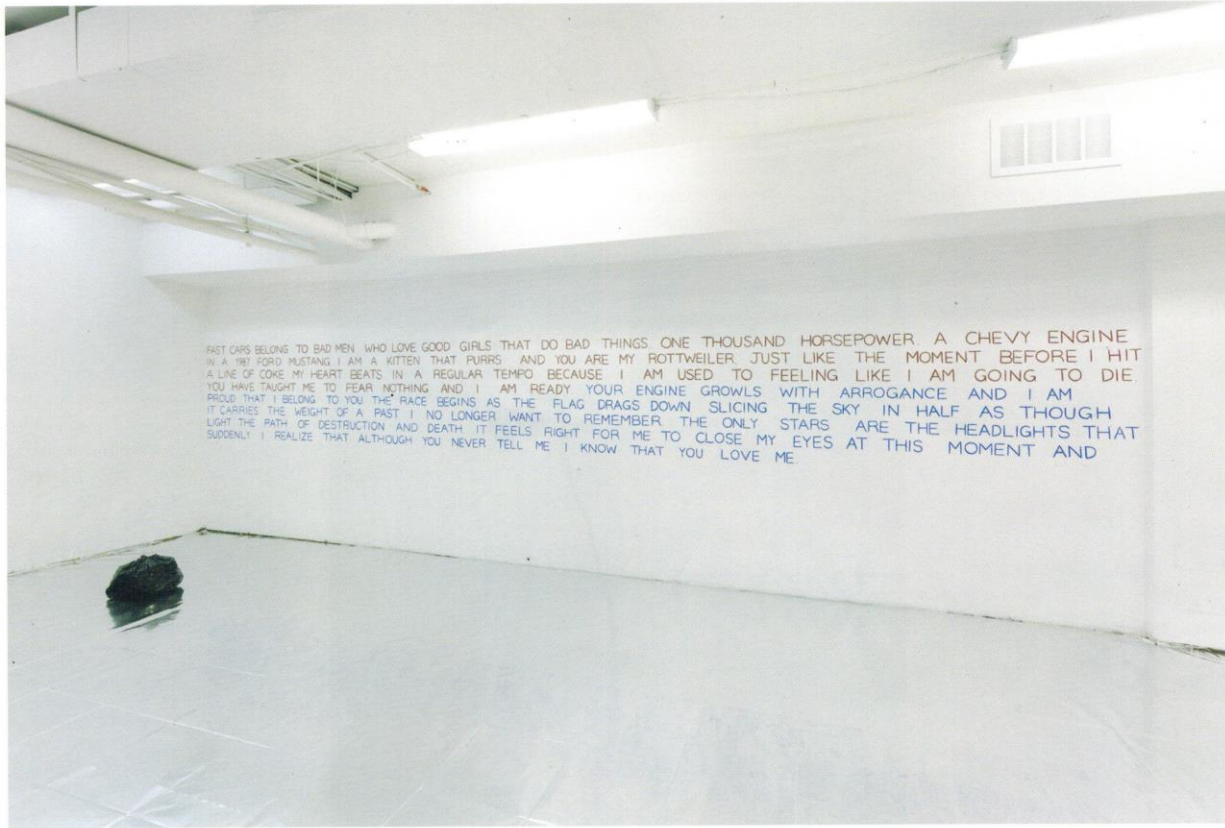
**YWC:** Yes, and it is true. But at the end of the day, I'm still really hopeful because I feel like everything points to me not [making art]. There are stories in my family of girls being unwanted because they were born into ultra-traditional families that disregarded females. Perhaps that could've been me! So there are certain historical factors that suggest my life should've been different, but I choose to pursue being an artist.

I always say my next painting is my best painting. I really want to be great, and I feel like that word can be misinterpreted, especially over the last couple of years, but I'm talking about great as in Muhammad Ali—"I'm the greatest, prettiest fighter out there"—this notion that you're overcoming everything life has used to discourage you. Helen Frankenthaler said that you judge a painting when you put it up on the wall with other people's paintings around it. That's really when you see if it's good or not.



Yan Wen Chang, *Untitled*, 2019-2022, white rose originally purchased at Rabba™ grocery and convenience store in a Yannessey bottle made by Chang's ex-best friend in 2019, filled with Mobil 0W-40 Full Synthetic Engine Oil made for European Cars™, dimensions varied. Installation documentation of "The size of the credit card" group exhibition curated by Daniel Griffin Hunt at the plumb (Toronto) from April 1 to April 29, 2022. Image courtesy of the artist and the plumb. Photo by Laura Findlay Documentation.

**Susan Hobbs Gallery Inc.**  
137 Tecumseth Street  
Toronto, Canada M6J 2H2  
Telephone 416 504 3699  
Facsimile 416 504 8064



Yan Wen Chang, *Untitled*, 2022, hand-painted blue and red gouache on wall, dimensions variable. Installation documentation of "The size of the credit card" group exhibition curated by Daniel Griffin Hunt at the plumb (Toronto) from April 1 to April 29, 2022. Image courtesy of the artist and the plumb. Photo by Laura Findlay Documentation.

**Susan Hobbs Gallery Inc.**  
137 Tecumseth Street  
Toronto, Canada M6J 2H2  
Telephone 416 504 3699  
Facsimile 416 504 8064

**AC:** You mostly use black and white in your paintings, and sometimes reds and blues. What makes this colour palette significant for you?

**YWC:** Using black and white resonated with me because I wasn't all that interested in colour, honestly. I liked the formal aspects and contrast of hard-edge painting more than I cared about the colours.

I also thought it was a good stand-in for the two opposing realities of the American Dream—one hopeful and defiant, the other hopeless and desperate. I work with a lot of grays now, and I mix some red and blue into those grays. Gray for me means living in the in-between space held by that opposition.

**AC:** Your current body of paintings is called "A. Dream," where "A." stands for American. How are these works formulated?

**YWC:** The body of work takes three forms. One is small works in gouache, usually with very saturated colors, that take less than two days to complete. Those are more about my lived experiences of coming here.

The second type of work is the self-portraits in the passenger seat. These are representations of the slant of my eyes and the grin, the reflections in the side- and rear-view mirrors of a car—I'm always in the passenger seat, I'm never the one driving. These are about learning that, particularly as an immigrant, you aren't as in control of your destiny as you'd like to be, and you never know what the destination might be, based on other factors bearing down on you.

The third form is a series of star paintings that test my endurance and perseverance. Content-wise, I'm sensitive to these traditional icons of the five-pointed star, the car, text, and the self. These are such loaded things to paint, but I'm trying to recast them. I'm trying to get to the purity of what these things mean, especially through the language of painting. I'm very interested in a combination of these iconic symbols and their materiality. With these works I'm trying to achieve both process and impulse at once.

**AC:** Quite often you reference other artists, like Abstract Expressionists, even though these references probably aren't as obvious as people might expect. Which artists do you find yourself thinking about most when you're working?

**YWC:** I think and talk a lot about Abstract Expressionists because they were coming up with new ways of painting. It's such a cliché, this idealized group in New York City after WWII, who came together and made big paintings because their studio spaces allowed for that. I like them because, when I look at the work, it feels free and brave, unafraid and intuitive. Those are qualities that make a great painting, to me. That's what I like about Frankenthaler, Robert Rauschenberg, Philip Guston, Jasper Johns, all of them.

In my current paintings, I usually think about Edward Ruscha. While the art scene was focused on New York, looking wide-eyed at the Abstract Expressionists like they were geniuses, Ruscha, John Baldessari, and Raymond Pettibon were their antiheroes in L.A. doing completely different things. My appreciation of text stems from those three artists. Ruscha has a particularly great way of talking about art. I love his colour palette and scale—he's so sensitive to mediums. The drawings using gunpowder instead of graphite are beautiful. The way I think about space in my paintings comes from Ruscha.

**AC:** It's fun to talk about painting again. Having studied art history, I got so tired of being taught about all of the same artists over and

over, and I haven't thought about painters in such a long time because of that.

**YWC:** I get that feedback from people all the time. They find it strange that I love to talk about such played-out artists, but it's a genuine feeling. When I look at their work, I just think, "That's a great painting!"

**AC:** You do consider yourself a painter, though it seems like making multimedia works and installations also comes very naturally to you. How would you describe your relationship to materials, which draws you to work with these different forms?

**YWC:** "The size of a credit card" at the plumb gave me a chance to work with replicas, which I truly love. On my 16th birthday, my dad gave me a Chanel bag—one of those classic quilted bags with the chain and the gold "CC" logo. At first I felt embarrassed, because I knew he couldn't afford it. It was perfectly wrapped in a dust bag, held in the watermarked Chanel tissue paper. When I looked inside at the authenticity card, it all hit me, because it said "Channel."

I asked my dad if it was real and he got so upset. He said, "Real and fake are the same thing. I worked really hard for this, so that's all that matters." That experience had a long-lasting effect. It's also a Hollywood-style underdog story of a father working really hard to buy an extravagant gift for his daughter—the luxury bag symbolizing his aspirations and goals for her to be successful.

If it had been "real," it would've stayed on a shelf so it didn't get ruined, but I wore the fake bag everywhere, because it was psychologically able to suit my needs. I still have it, too, so I think about "knockoffs" a lot. For "The size of the credit card," I used a customized Hennessy bottle, and personalized replicas of Marcel Breuer's Wassily chair. The chairs also have a connection to [the film] *American Psycho*, because Paul Allen is sitting in Breuer's white Barcelona chair in the scene where Patrick Bateman kills him.

Everybody wants a Wassily chair, but there were only a hundred ever made. When I got a replica on Kijiji, the leather seat was white, but it was never made in white. I love something that is so fake to the point of hardly trying to be the original.

**AC:** I completely agree with the idea that the real thing and the fake thing are the same. The whole reason the fake thing exists in the first place is because the real thing is an aspirational status symbol. Without that inverse relationship, there would be no replica, or need for one. The Wassily chairs were very interesting to me because they were loaded with references, both personal and from pop culture, like *American Psycho*.

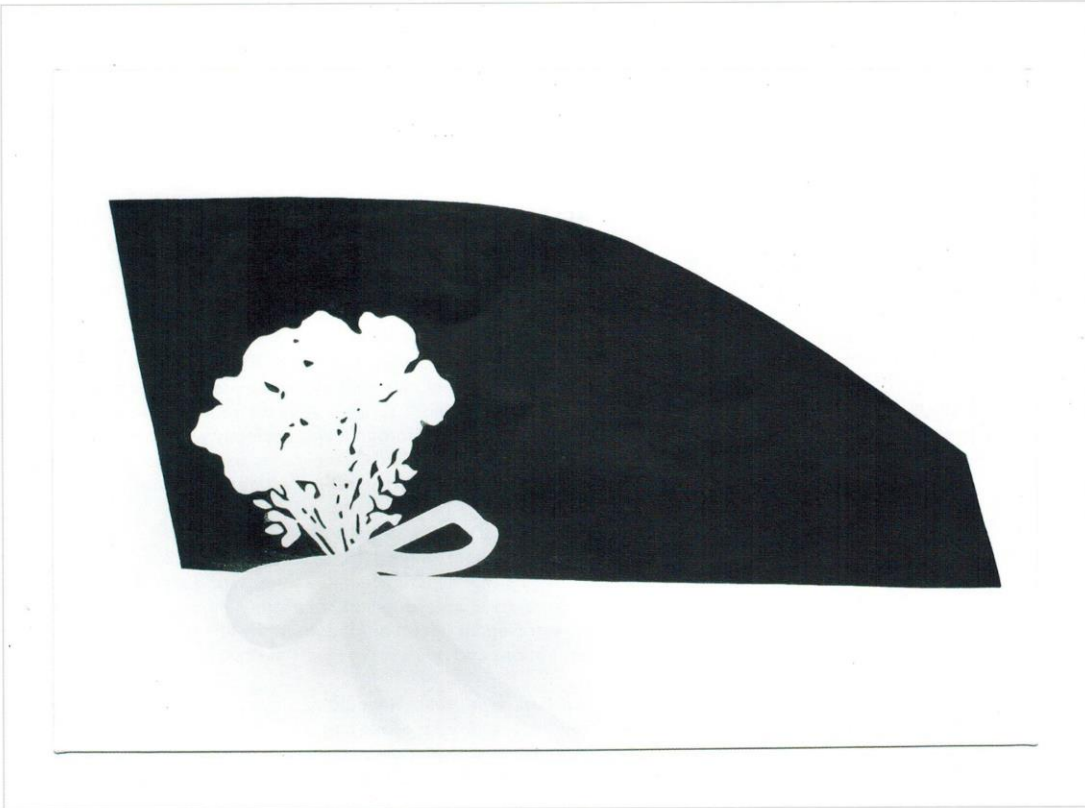
**YWC:** For me, it's an iconic movie of America. Aspiration, luxury, power, petty jealousy, murder—pure capitalism. How could I not refer to it?

**AC:** I think you've indirectly answered this already, but I'm guessing it was intentional to use knockoffs of the Jacquemus mini handbag for *Yan's Revenge*.

**YWC:** Of course. In fact I get the ones without the logo, but everybody knows what the reference is from the shape of it. Me customizing it is really like a Honda Civic being modified for a street race. It is funny that those bags are only a few years old, but they were instantly iconic the second they came out. If everyone knows it, then it's an easy entry point to play with people's heads, especially those who are invested in the real thing.

**Susan Hobbs Gallery Inc.**  
137 Tecumseth Street  
Toronto, Canada M6J 2H2  
Telephone 416 504 3699  
Facsimile 416 504 8064





**AC:** I also think a lot about the trend of luxury designers who were using the aesthetics of bootlegs in their own collections not too long ago. I remember the Gucci Fall 2020 runway had a briefcase covered in the iconic Gucci print, with the red and green stripes, but with "FAKE" in big yellow letters on it. Now these boutique designers making limited collections using bootleg aesthetics, creating garments out of a host of different references plastered together, such as *Boot Boyz*, are very popular.

**YWC:** I think it really has to do with the dissemination of information, too. I imagine a 17-year-old little Yan in Malaysia, waking up to Tumblr with all this culture pushed into my face. What am I going to do? I'm just going to mismatch everything!

**AC:** The text piece you painted on the wall, in the show, struck me as a mashup of movie scripts the first time I read it, as though an AI had taken bits and pieces of quintessential American films and put them together. It felt almost like the way David Lynch would treat it, like an uncanny, rusted-over Americana. Could you talk about that piece?

**YWC:** Yes, I love that. I really like movies, and I wrote the text for that piece like a screenplay, so I was trying to describe that feeling of something cinematic or oddly melodramatic. When I came here and started consuming North American culture, it was a mixture of everything. I was always "behind," so my consumption of culture here has always been accelerated and hybridized. I'm not surprised this piece reflects that. All those references are my outsider's take.

**AC:** The other pieces from the plumb show are listed by their materials rather than having titles, and they're very specific. A lot of it is rather personal, like the "Yannessy" bottle made by someone you're no longer friends with, and one of the chairs taken from an ex-boyfriend. There's a real coming together in your work of personal themes, like family and relationships, and all of these concepts from film or art history. Is it just intuitive for you to work like that?

**YWC:** I list those things because I want to be honest. Perhaps it's the same as specifying that a canvas is raw rather than gessoed. Listing the materials out was like a conversation with my connections to them. I feel like they do allude to personal relationships, but they don't indulge too much. I have always been resistant to making things through self-indulgence or pure self-expression, but sometimes it's inevitable.

**AC:** I also saw the video installation you did for *The Shell Projects* in 2018, which was about your dad. It seems like there is an impulse for you to return to family in your work.

**YWC:** Yeah, for the work I've been doing with the *American Dream*, so much is related to generations that have come before me and how I exist today. It'd be wrong if I didn't talk about that. My family's desires for me to do well, their sacrifices and work ethic, me being first generation here—it all has to do with family, first and foremost.


**AC:** The narration of the video also sounds filmic, almost like this personal history is woven through a type of film work as a way of keeping a bit of a distance.

**Susan Hobbs Gallery Inc.**  
 137 Tecumseth Street  
 Toronto, Canada M6J 2H2  
 Telephone 416 504 3699  
 Facsimile 416 504 8064



**YWC:** The most impactful director for me is Wong Kar Wai. I recently read an essay on him that said if you look at pieces from all of his films, sometimes you can't remember which is which, and that's the point of it. They imitate life so much, but what's really going on is very hazy.

**AC:** What's coming up next for you?

**YWC:** *same problem my father had and what he dreamed*, which is a text-based public billboard I made for the Cannon Project Wall at Hamilton Artists Inc. will be up from June 30th until May 29th, 2023. My MFA thesis exhibition, "A. Dream," will be at General Hardware Contemporary in Toronto from June 23rd to July 16th. After this I will have a solo exhibition at XiR in Toronto from August 27th to September 17th. Next year, I am exhibiting alongside Katie Bethune-Leamen at Susan Hobbs Gallery in Toronto, which will run from January 19th to February 25th, 2023. 

*Angel Callander is a writer and editor in Toronto, currently Assistant Editor of Peripheral Review. Her work can be found in publications such as Canadian Art, C Magazine, Public Parking, and Cornelia, as well as in Interface Critique I (Kulturverlag Kadmos, 2016) and Architecture and the Smart City (Routledge, 2019).*

**Pg. 36:** Yan Wen Chang, *Untitled with Bouquet of Roses*, 2021, oil on canvas, 102cm x 71cm. Image courtesy of the artist.

Yan Wen Chang, *Portrait of Self in Passenger Seat No. 14 with Pair of Dice*, 2021, Oil on canvas, 142cm x 97cm; *Welcome Home*, 2021, gouache on canvas, 28cm x 36cm; *Two dragonflies as mother and daughter forever flying in circles around the only rose in Kuala Lumpur*, 2021, gouache on denim, 28cm x 36cm (installation view). Image courtesy of the artist.

**Susan Hobbs Gallery Inc.**  
 137 Tecumseth Street  
 Toronto, Canada M6J 2H2  
 Telephone 416 504 3699  
 Facsimile 416 504 8064



## YAN WEN CHANG

**I**t's been a period of triumphant success for Chang: She started her MFA at Guelph University and got sober. She credits the latter with making the former a seamless and fruitful experience. The painter is currently working toward her 2022 thesis exhibition, contemplating the American Dream and how it's been perverted or never really existed at all. As an immigrant who moved to Canada at 17 alone from Malaysia, chasing the dream of a better life fascinates her. Since she began work on her master's, she has also exhibited in a group show at A.D. Gallery in New York City and continued a series of hand-painted handbags that she makes collaboratively with her mother, who still lives in Malaysia.

"I had a really good year of making art. I've been sober for a year and three months. I got sober at the same time I started school and it gave me that focus and discipline to make work every day.

"I stayed in Toronto for my first year and all my classes were online. Each semester we had critiques and I was making paintings larger than I've ever worked on before. I spent 12 hours a day in my studio and I had this separate space where I hung all the paintings and documented them. It was so strange that no one saw them, that I was essentially making paintings to be viewed only online. My professors didn't see them in person until months later.

"It's been a strange year for me, but it was really good for my practice. I entered my MFA at a precarious time and it's only with huge amounts of privilege that I get to create work during a pandemic. It's insane to think that people we're working their asses off to save people's lives and I was allowed to do this. But making art is the only thing I know how to do, and it's the best thing I can do in this world."

Susan Hobbs Gallery Inc.  
137 Tecumseth Street  
Toronto, Canada M6J 2H2  
Telephone 416 504 3699  
Facsimile 416 504 8064

Susan Hobbs Gallery Inc.  
137 Tecumseth Street  
Toronto, Canada M6J 2H2  
Telephone 416 504 3699  
Facsimile 416 504 8064