WE DON'T NEED ANOTHER HERO

A DUO EXHIBITION BY JAY TAN AND YIN YIN WONG

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Wei-Ling Gallery

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3 — 26 JULY 2025

WEI-LING GALLERY
KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA

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&
PENSION PLANNING, GUNNAR MEIER (JAY TAN);
BART-TREUREN (YIN YIN WONG)

“We don’t need another way home, all we want is life beyond the Thunderdome.”
— Tina Turner

‘We Don’t Need Another Hero’ brings together artists Jay Tan and Yin Yin Wong in a duo exhibition that challenges the seductive pull of heroic archetypes. Drawing from personal histories, family mythologies, and cultural iconography, the artists deconstruct inherited ideals of masculinity, morality, and exceptionalism — offering instead an archive of gestures, characters, props and signs that tell more complex and ambiguous stories.

Tan and Wong trace the silhouette of the *“hero in white”*, commonly a figure in Chinese cultural memory symbolising nobility, sacrifice, and moral clarity, and ask: what does this figure demand from us? Is he an inspiration, or a burden? Can we tease his stoicism, mistranslate his nobility, or disassemble his myth?
Positioned between class strata, nations, and accents, the exhibition reflects on the diasporic experience of moving both up and across: through society, through narrative structures, through (gendered) expectations. From shopkeepers and opera singers to professional golfers and unmaintained aquaria, the works invoke unlikely figures of heroism. These are individuals whose lives speak through steady endurance, invisible labour, and quiet rebellion.

Set against the backdrop of a world that constantly asks for more sacrifice, more transformation, and more performance, the artists invite us to queer the script. They encourage us to trace alternative arcs, to honour the shelf-life, the closing hour, the counter-top. The question is no longer how to become a hero. It becomes a matter of how to live beyond the score entirely.


JAY TAN

Windmill Legs and Auntie Power: The Art of Jay Tan

Jay Tan's world is built from things we're told not to take seriously. Pinwheels, figurines, slippers, cheap plastic trinkets. Objects that would never win awards in a school art competition, let alone a biennale. But in Tan's hands, these things spin, stretch, and sparkle with a mischief that's both hilarious and quietly devastating.

Their practice follows a kind of instinct you can't learn in a textbook. The materials are often familiar — things you might find at the bottom of a stationery drawer or in a forgotten toy box. At first glance, the works look simple, maybe even like something you could make at home. But the longer you stay with them, the more they shift. Tan isn't trying to dazzle. They're asking what happens when you pay close attention to the things you've been trained to ignore. When you treat everyday ornament as memory, as language, as evidence.

The windmill legs from *Kung Fu Hustle* are a perfect example. That landlady with her curlers and cigarette wasn't just comic relief. She was our auntie-warrior, a kind of reluctant superhero who didn't need a cape, just a slipper. The film itself, directed by Stephen Chow, is almost a staple during Chinese New Year; playing in the background while someone peels mandarin oranges or snoozes on the couch. Tan takes that iconic image, freezes her mid-spin, and turns her into sculpture. The legs move, but not by choice. They're caught in a cycle powered by expectation rather than intention. Like the ballerina in *The Red Shoes*, cursed to keep dancing long after the music should have stopped. It's funny, then suddenly exhausting. Anyone who's ever been told to keep going just because others expect you to will feel the weight of that spin.

Tan's use of recognisable forms — whether a pair of legs or a plastic toy — feels like a kind of reclaiming. These aren't props from childhood or kitschy decor. They're clues. Signals. Winks. Tan pulls from the visual language of domestic craft, street markets, sticker books, and diasporic imagination, but arranges them in a way that questions the ideals we're fed. They don't just celebrate the pop icons. They ask why we needed them in the first place, and why entire structures from movies to policymaking prefer heroes who are tidy and linear, when the rest of us are just trying to make sense of the chaos.

Tan's clay figurines are lovingly awkward. They look like the kind of things you'd make during school holidays: fimo clay, bent paperclips, googly eyes. But look again, and there's Margaret Leng Tan, Patty Chang, Kelly Tan — people who made their own myths because no one was writing them in the first place.

These figures aren't polished. They aren't monumental. But they are deeply seen. I look at them and think, this is what a shrine looks like in the hands of someone who grew up with pasar malam gods and YouTube rabbit holes.

The periscopes Tan installs are made from cardboard and found mirrors. They don't show you anything immediately profound. Instead, they ask you to look again, tilt your head, adjust. It feels like growing up in a country that doesn't quite see you either. Chinese but not China. Malaysian but not Malay. Caught between clarity and camouflage. To see through Tan's lens is to understand that sometimes the best way to find yourself is to make your own viewfinder.

In their video *Eternal Schmmernels*, Tan moves between two wildly different characters. The stoic Lan Wangji and the cigarette-flicking landlady from *Kung Fu Hustle*. They don't appear side by side, but pass through one another in a kind of glitchy succession, overlapping briefly in transition. That moment of in-between becomes the most telling, where restraint and chaos flicker together before the scene shifts again. The result is chaotic, glittery, and very funny. But it also says something about the roles we're told to play. Noble ascetic. Raging auntie. What happens when those stereotypes collide, not to destroy each other, but to rewire the whole script?

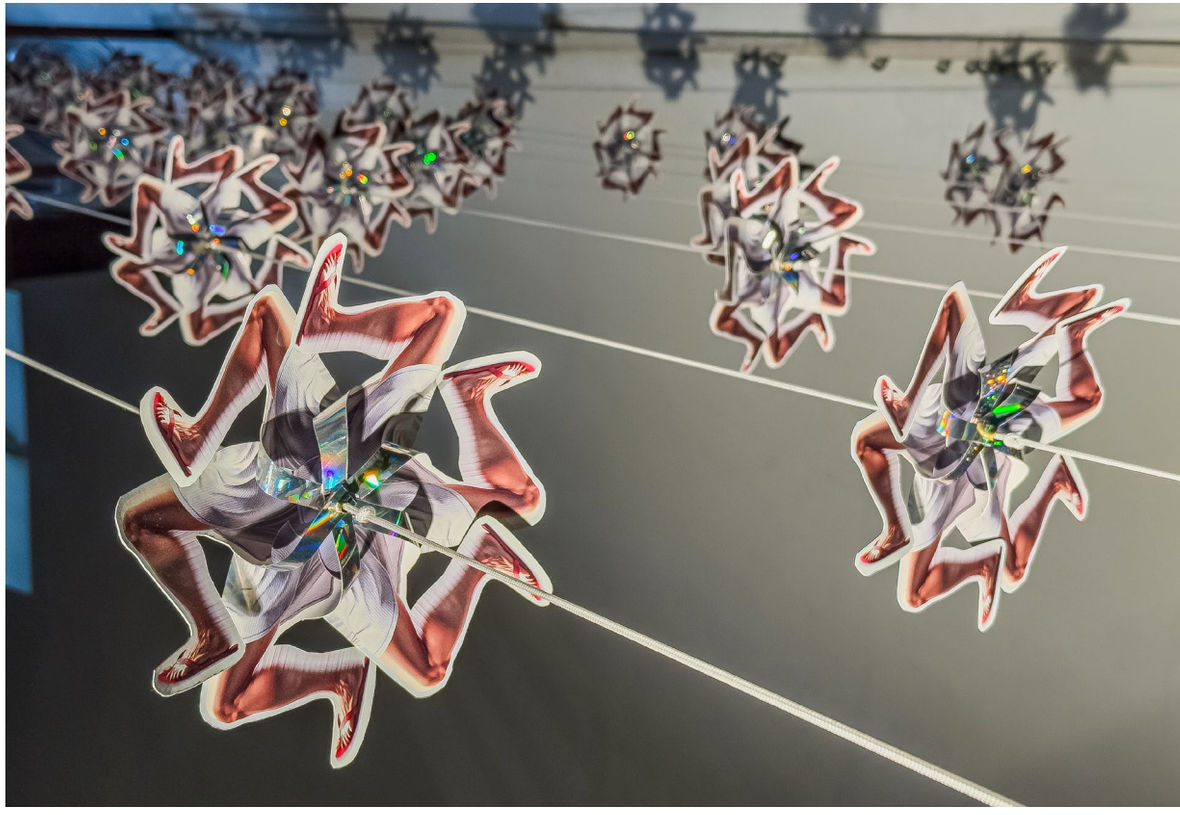
There's also a blue that shows up in Tan's work. Not a sad blue, but a charged one. It's not just a colour, but a signal. The kind of blue you see in porcelain, in temple ceilings, in the skies just before dawn. It's the blue of old Chinese dramas, where gods descended in flowing robes, always swathed in this particular shade. A colour that marked goodness, protection, celestial power used not for destruction, but for care. In their world, that blue slips across mediums like a low-glow current. It shows up in quiet circles, on screens, in corners, holding everything together. Not flashy. Not loud. Just present, steady, watching. It's not the kind of power that shouts. It's the kind that stays. It hums quietly across the exhibition, like a breath held in.

Jay Tan doesn't ask us to decode anything. The work isn't a puzzle. It's an invitation. Come play. Come remember. Come laugh a little too hard and feel weird about it. Come see how power can wear house slippers and still change the air in the room.

For me, Tan's work reminds me that cultural memory isn't just in history books or museum vitrines. Sometimes, it's in sticker albums, in half-broken toys, in things that sparkle not despite their cheapness, but because of it. And in that glimmer, we recognise something honest. Something like love.

Written by Prissie Ong

7



Kung Fu Hustle Landlady, 2024
Inkjet print, holographic card, fans, string
Dimensions variable

Installation view at Wei-Ling Gallery

Close-up of hanging trinkets

Yang Li-Hua (Flapping), 2025
Printed fabric, fans, mugs, string, mixed media
Dimensions variable

Who Doin' What...Where are you? (Periscopes featuring: Kelly Tan, Margaret Leng Tan, Erica Tan, Patty Chang), 2025
Cardboard tubes, vintage mirrors, paper tape
Dimensions variable

11

Kelly Tan, 2023
Polymer clay
7cm x 7cm x 12cm

Margaret Leng Tan, 2023
Polymer clay
15cm x 15cm x 15cm

Erica Tan, 2023
Polymer clay
10cm x 10cm x 15cm

Patty Chang, 2024
Polymer clay
10cm x 10cm x 15cm

11

Video still

Eternals Shmernals (Kung Fu Hustle Landlady x Lan Wangji), 2024
Single-channel video, no sound
6 min loop

Video still

Charging (Sword Fingers), 2024
Single-channel video, no sound
3 min loop

Installation view at Wei-Ling Contemporary


YIN YIN WONG
cessful now.

A Psalm for the Unnamed: On Yin Yin Wong's Altars, Gyms, and Patriarchal Figures

There's a kind of ghost that follows us. Not one that floats in white sheets or creaks through old staircases, but one that hides in supermarket aisles, wet markets, and the pixelated memories of fathers who may or may not have been at dinner last week. For those who grew up in the back kitchens of hawker stalls, who heard the word "Boss" used more as a greeting than a title, Yin Yin Wong's work hits something soft and half-forgotten.

Their altar in *A Psalm for Hungry Ghosts (Think of Others)* doesn't linger in the nostalgia we've come to expect from diasporic artists. Gone are the tins of Apollo wafers and little red plastic stools. In their place are grief, solidarity, and a stubborn kind of care — for Palestine, for those whose stories have been erased, and for those of us still learning how to listen. Wong's gesture isn't a performance of identity, but a form of reckoning. This altar doesn't ask for sentimentality. It asks whether we've been paying attention. And whether we'll keep paying attention, even when it hurts.

If the altar mourns, then The Gym wrestles. At Wei-Ling Gallery, the installation takes the shape of a makeshift gym built from things you might find in a storeroom. Two large cans are joined by a metal pole to form dumbbells — there are two of them, resting on the floor as if waiting for someone to pick them up. Three more cans support long poles, each ending in a melted candle. The wax drips are still visible, left over from their performance where the candles were lit. That small detail, the leftover melt, gives the work a sense of having been used. This isn't a display of untouched objects. It's a space shaped by action, by repetition, by care. Strength here doesn't come from control or perfection. It comes from effort, from using what's at hand, from trying and doing and trying again. Wong builds something that feels familiar, not in form but in spirit.

Lightboxes are a recurring format in Wong's practice. Drawing from the visual language of Chinese diasporic neighbourhoods, they reference the handmade signs often seen in shop windows. Stylised text, auspicious symbols, and photographic prints. Taken out of their original commercial setting, they become something else. Not advertising, but attention.

In *Muscles from Brussels / Little Dragon*, two torsos — one belonging to Jean-Claude van Damme, the other to Bruce Lee — are cropped and lit from behind. Their faces are removed, as if expression no longer holds meaning. What's left is muscle, posture, skin. A version of masculinity reduced to its surface. The image echoes the look of neighbourhood gym posters, but stripped of swagger. What stays is the repetition behind the pose, the performance beneath the performance.

Then there is *Boss*, a photo lightbox showing a scene from everyday life. A man stands behind rows of roasted chickens and char siew, likely the owner of a chicken rice stall. A setup that's common across Malaysia. He's mid-task, packing orders with his hands in motion, surrounded by the signs of a working day: hanging chickens, stacked plates, a cleaver resting on a circular wooden chopping board, and slices of chicken waiting to be packed into takeaway containers. To the left, reflected faintly in the glass of the stall, is the outline of the person taking the photo. The camera isn't visible, and the faces of both the man and the photographer are obscured. Any clear identifying markers have been carefully left out. What remains is a scene shaped by action and distance. It's easy to move past it, but something stays with you. Is there more here than we care to ask? What is the artist trying to show or perhaps withhold?

In *Little Dragon Big Fight*, Bruce Lee's figure in his signature stance is drawn on receipt paper and paired with Wong's Chinese seal. The receipt paper, with its printed grids and sharp lines, feels cold and functional. It is meant for quick transactions, not lasting impressions. But the seal interrupts that. It is hand-carved and pressed in red ink, a physical gesture that carries care and intention. Unlike the uniformity of the printed page, the seal is deeply personal. It holds a name, but also a touch — a moment of human presence stamped into something otherwise mechanical. That quiet insistence on individuality reflects what Bruce Lee embodied. Known as the "Little Dragon," he pushed back against how Asian masculinity was erased or distorted in Western media. He was precise, focused, and self-possessed. Not loud, but unmistakably present. In Wong's work, Lee is not a frozen icon. He is a figure caught in the same tension as the seal and the paper. Between repetition and agency, between being seen and being reduced.

And if anyone cared to watch the full length of Wong's performance, they'd realise that it is the thread that ties everything together. It doesn't just accompany the artworks but rather, it brings them into focus. Each moment, each movement, loops back to the altar, the gym, the lightboxes. It's all there, woven through the performance like a quiet map, if you stay long enough to notice.

Throughout the piece, Wong moves between Dutch, Cantonese, and English. These shifts aren't decorative. They form a kind of internal map — a way of marking out a life shaped across different languages and places. The transitions speak to Wong's diasporic upbringing, but they also push against the idea that a person can ever be fully defined by a single voice. At one point, Wong reenacts their arrest during a protest for Palestine. The Dutch police assumed they didn't speak Dutch. That moment hits hard. Racism often assumes silence. It assumes you're foreign, outside, voiceless. But Wong does speak. They joke,

they perform, they respond. And in doing so, they push back against every label meant to contain them.

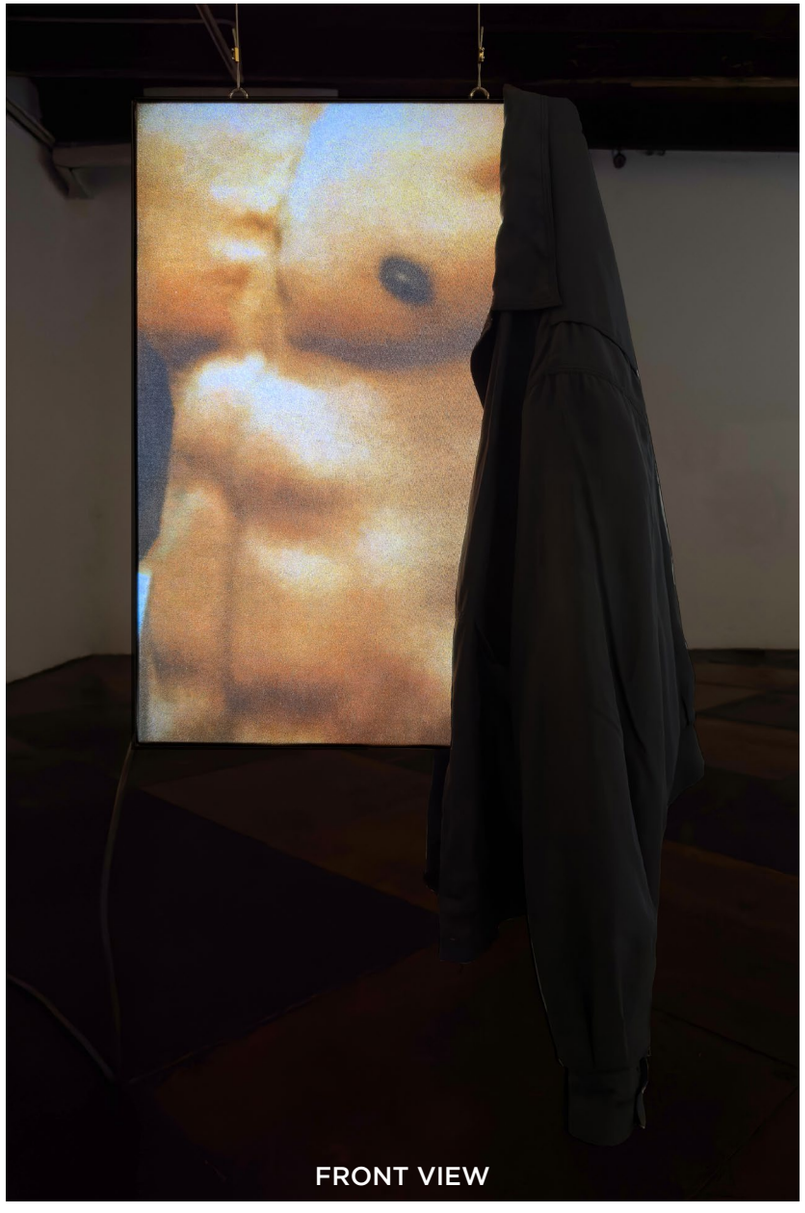
Wong's performance also held a quieter ache. They bring to mind abandonment — not just the act of someone leaving, but the way we often turn the blame inward when they do. We ask ourselves the questions in silence. Were we not enough? Was it something we did, or something we missed In Wong's performance, this quiet ache takes on a slightly comedic rhythm. The kind that makes you laugh, then wonder why you're laughing. This ache lingers in their pacing, in their delivery, in the way it is folded into punchlines; masking an undercurrent of grief. The blame game isn't loud. It sits at the edges of Wong's gestures, the way memory sometimes lingers in the corners of a room. Their performance isn't just a response to absence. It is a record of surviving it.

Wong has said their work is made for their mother, someone who once asked after watching an experimental film, "No beginning, no end?" That desire for clarity without giving up complexity shapes everything they do. The message may begin with the mother, but it reaches far beyond her. It speaks to anyone who grew up in between — between languages, between places, between being visible and being misread. Wong's work doesn't fix those edges. It stays close to them. It doesn't offer neat conclusions. Instead, it creates space where memory, loss, identity, and survival can exist together. No need for hierarchy. No need for a punchline. Just a kind of presence. And for those still learning how to carry all of it, that presence feels like home.

Written by Prissie Ong

Boss, 2025
Aluminium lightbox, Sublimated UV print on fabric
70cm x 100cm

Installation view at Wei-Ling Contemporary



FRONT VIEW

BACK VIEW

Muscles from Brussels / Little Dragon, 2025
Aluminium lightbox, Sublimated UV print on fabric
40cm x 60cm

Psalm for a Hungry Ghost (Think of Others), 2025
Acrylic lightbox, acrylic paint, various objects
60cm x 120cm

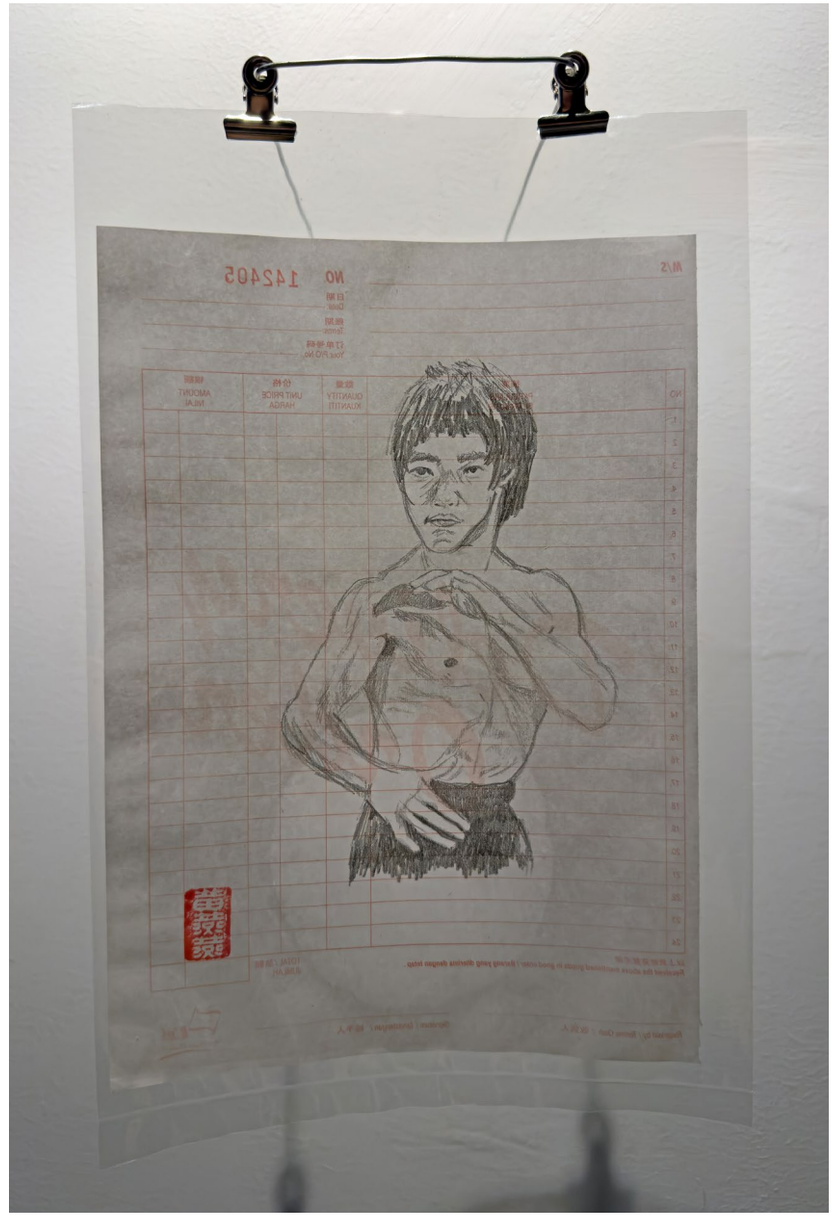
Close-up of **Psalm for a Hungry Ghost (Think of Others)**

Peach, Lychee & Fruit Cocktail, Deluxe Dumbbell & Candle set, 2025
Steel rods, tins, concrete
Dimensions variable

Installation view at Wei-Ling Gallery

Video still

Psalm for a Hungry Ghost (performance), 2025
Performed at Hotel Maria Kapel, Hoorn
Single-channel video, 1h12m



Little dragon, Big Fight, 2025
Graphite on receipt paper
18cm x 25.2cm

Installation view at Wei-Ling Gallery

Yin Yin Wong Photograph credit: Bart Treuren. Courtesy of Hotel Maria Kapel, Hoorn

YIN YIN WONG (B.1988, NL)

Yin Yin Wong is an artist and cultural worker based in Rotterdam. Working across various media including performance, drawing and site-specific installation, they look for bridges and juxtapositions that challenge both their Dutch cultural heritage as well as their Malaysian-Chinese background. Taking inspiration from their childhood growing up in the restaurant of their parents, their work offers intimate glimpses into a diaspora that is best known for their silent and self-sacrificing resilience. By employing humour, hospitality and eclectic material sensibility, they connect their lived experience to complex cultural histories of migration and displacement.

Their work has been exhibited at Hotel Maria Kapel, Hoorn; BRUTUS, Rotterdam; Pocoapoco, Oaxaca (MX); A Tale of a Tub, Rotterdam; Framer Framed, Amsterdam; Natasha– Singapore Biennale ’22 and Venice Biennale ’22. Yin Yin Wong is an educator at the Royal Academy of Art, The Hague, a Supervisory Board member of Kunstinstituut Melly, Rotterdam, an advisor at Stimuleringsfonds Creative Industries, Rotterdam and member of the selection committee at Jan van Eyck Academy, Maastricht.

Click to view CV.

Note:
Yin Yin Wong uses ‘they/them’ pronouns and identify as non-binary, a term that describes gender identities that are not exclusively male or female.

Jay Studio portrait 2024 credit: Clem Edwards

JAY TAN (B. 1982, UK)

Jay Tan is an artist and educator based in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. They combine everyday materials with recontextualised personal and pop cultural references to make sculptures and installations that feature figurines, low-res video and other moving parts. This decorative vernacular they think of as Aesthetic Rubble is used to process the feelings that arise as they try to learn about large systems of knowledge like Chinese religious practices or macroeconomics.

They have shown work at Tale of A Tub, Rotterdam; Hartwig Art Foundation, Amsterdam; Tent, Rotterdam; the CACC, Paris; Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art, Warsaw; Ellen de Bruijne Projects and Gallerie van Gelder, Amsterdam; Futura, Prague; Kunstverein, Amsterdam; Vleeshal, Middleburg; the CAC, Vilnius; Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam; Hollybush Gardens, London; Kunstinstituut Melly, Rotterdam and RongWrong, Amsterdam.

Click to view CV.

Note:
Jay Tan uses 'they/them' pronouns and identify as non-binary, a term that describes gender identities that are not exclusively male or female.

To accompany the exhibition titled **'We Don't Need Another Hero'**, a duo exhibition by Jay Tan and Yin Yin Wong from 3 — 27 July 2025

Gallery Information
Operating Hours: 10 AM – 6 PM (Tuesday to Friday),
Operating Hours: 10 AM – 5 PM (Saturday)
Closed: Sundays, Mondays, and Public Holidays

Image Courtesy : Wei-Ling Gallery & Yin Yin Wong & Jay Tan
Artwork images & insitu photographed by Prissie Ong

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Wei-Ling Gallery