



*The Gathering of Animal Fiends*, 2025, oil on canvas,  
25 1/2 x 19 1/2 x 7/8 in (64.8 x 49.5 x 2.2 cm)

48 WALKER ST, VIEWING ROOM | NOV 7-25, 2025

# Yun-Fei Ji

## *Riding the Tiger*

James Cohan is pleased to present *Riding the Tiger*, an exhibition of new paintings by Yun-Fei Ji, on view in the gallery's 48 Walker Street viewing room from November 7 through November 25, 2025. This is the artist's seventh solo exhibition with James Cohan. The gallery will host an opening reception with the artist on Friday, November 7 from 6-8 PM.

In his latest body of work, Yun-Fei Ji deepens his meditation on migration and belonging through a visual language that intertwines Chinese folklore with lived experience. Drawing upon the allegorical archetypes, parables, and moral cosmology of the narratives he absorbed as a child, including the 16th-century Chinese novel *Journey to the West*, Ji employs these rich traditions as frameworks for exploring the psychological and spiritual dimensions of displacement. Pulling us into a world populated by demons, spirits, and celestial soldiers, Ji reflects on the current migration crisis in the United States.

Ji translates this layered symbolism into contemporary life, revealing how the struggles and aspirations of ordinary people echo endless cycles of endurance, transformation, and renewal. Within his universe, animal and spectral figures move alongside human subjects. *Riding the Tiger*, the exhibition's title, underscores the significance of the animal in both Chinese mythology and Ji's visual language. In the titular painting, *Riding the Tiger*, 2025, a buddha rides a prowling tiger. While the buddha signals inner peace and enlightenment, the tiger embodies a primal force that can be either beneficial or destructive. Their relationship reflects the tensions between control, fear, and survival that course through Ji's paintings. In this balance of control and chaos, Ji's tiger also resonates with our present political moment—one defined by volatility, shifting power structures, and unease. The painting is a metaphor for navigating the instability of our times while striving to maintain spiritual equilibrium.

Other spirit animals that appear in Ji's paintings, such as rams, and goats, represent an indomitable and independent spirit that authorities often seek to suppress and purge. In *The Arrest of the Goat Demon* and *The Sweep Up of Animal Spirits*, both 2025, militants dressed in fatigues restrict and round up these creatures, their captivity transforming the compositions into meditations on power and vulnerability that evoke the current targeting of immigrant communities by government institutions in the US.

Ji's compositions unfold as intricate vignettes—flattened, vertically stacked scenes that draw from the lineage of classical Chinese painting while transforming it through contemporary sensibilities. Unlike traditional ink on paper, Ji works in oil on canvas, a medium that allows for rich color, layered texture, and a density of brushwork that conveys both materiality and movement. Reversing the colonial gaze of early Modernists who once mined Asian aesthetics for their own cultural fantasies, Ji reclaims this visual language to center the contemporary migrant experience. His paintings are both acts of witness and rituals of transformation, charting the delicate balance between the corporeal and the spiritual, the grounded and the transcendent.

Yun-Fei Ji was born in 1963 in Beijing, China. He earned his BFA from the Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing, and his MFA from the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville in Fayetteville, Arkansas. In 2005, Ji was Artist-in-residence at Yale University, where he conducted extensive research with the institution's scholars. He received the 2006 American Academy Prix de Rome Fellowship and Residency and was the 2007 Artist-in-residence at the Parasol Unit Foundation for Contemporary Art in London. Major solo exhibitions include *Ji Yun-Fei: Last Days of Village Wen* at the Cleveland Museum of Art; *Yun-Fei Ji: The Intimate Universe* at the Ruth and Elmer Wellin Museum of Art at Hamilton College, which traveled to the Honolulu Museum of Art (2016); and *Yun-Fei Ji: Waterworks* at the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art in Beijing, China (2013). Ji has been the subject of further solo exhibitions at the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts, Kalamazoo, MI; Paul and Lulu Hilliard Museum of Art, University of Louisiana, Lafayette, LA; the University Museum of Contemporary Art, UMASS Amherst, MA; Contemporary Art Museum, St. Louis; the Rose Museum at Brandeis University, Waltham; the Peeler Art Center, DePauw University, Greencastle; and the Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

Ji's work has been widely exhibited throughout the United States and Europe, including the 2002 Whitney Biennial, the 2011 Lyon Biennale, and the 2012 Biennale of Sydney. In 2008, his work was featured in *Displacement: The Three Gorges Dam and Contemporary Chinese Art*, an exhibition of four Chinese artists which originated at the Smart Museum of Art, Chicago, Illinois, and toured nationally. In 2014, Ji presented a new monumental scroll for the Prospect.3 New Orleans biennial, curated by Franklin Sirmans. In 2016, his work was included in *Show and Tell: Stories in Chinese Paintings* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. From 2018-2019, Ji was featured in the exhibition *Hand Drawn Action Packed*, which traveled to five museums throughout the United Kingdom. Ji has been the subject of several monographs, including *Yun-Fei Ji: The Intimate Universe* (2016, co-published by Delmonico and the Wellin Museum of Art) and *Yun-Fei Ji: Water Work* (2013, published by UCCA Books). Ji's work is included in the permanent collections of major public institutions including the Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY; Asia Society Museum, New York, NY; Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore, MD; Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, VA; British Museum, London, United Kingdom; Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon, Portugal; Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA; Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, OH; Norton Museum of Art, West Palm Beach, FL; Harvard Art Museums, Cambridge, MA; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA; Nasher Museum at Duke University, Durham, NC; Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT and the Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY. Yun-Fei Ji currently lives and works in New Jersey.

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