



VILLA MAGDALENA

PURPLE

EAST MEETS WEST SIX FEMALE ARTISTS IN NEW YORK

Bill Powers and Anfisa Vrubel
Spring Summer 2023



Photo: Stevie and Mada

YUAN FANG

BILL POWERS — Did anything surprise you about New York?

YUAN FANG — There are more racists here than I would have guessed. New York is kind of sold to you as a melting pot and a haven of freedom. It doesn't exactly live up to the credo of the Statue of Liberty.

BILL POWERS — When did you move to New York?

YUAN FANG — When I was 18, I came here to do my undergraduate studies at the School of Visual Arts. I grew

up in Shenzhen, China, near Hong Kong. I had been to America once before with my parents, at the end of middle school. We traveled across the country. New York stayed with me the most.

BILL POWERS — What did you first like about it?

YUANFANG — There was an interesting tension everywhere. Maybe I was naive to think this, but the city made me feel that anything was possible.

BILL POWERS — In his essay "This is New York," E.B. White says that no one should come to New York to live unless they are willing to be lucky.



VILLA MAGDALENA

YUAN FANG — It was not about luck for me as much as opportunity. I felt like hard work could get me success here more than any other place.

BILL POWERS — And you first got acquainted with New York painters when you moved here?

YUAN FANG — Because of my school ID, I got into all the museums for free. My dad always loved Edward Hopper. I would spend a lot of time at the Whitney, the MoMA, and The Met. I remember seeing a Jackson Pollock show during my freshman year, and it struck me: the possibility of painting. I liked the raw physicality and how you could see his interaction with the canvas. Now painting is an inseparable part of my own life. I can always count on my paintings to find happiness.

BILL POWERS — What don't you like about New York?

YUAN FANG — I don't like the winter. Where I grew up, the climate was like Miami. I never saw snow before I moved to America. I can't handle the sun going down at 4 PM. I like to work with natural light. Also, is there anyone who likes rats in the subway?

BILL POWERS — Who are your favorite New York artists?

YUAN FANG — Lee Krasner and Ross Bleckner.

BILL POWERS — Has New York influenced your work?

YUAN FANG — I think the intensity and speed and concentration of the city have gone into my paintings.

ANH DUONG

BILL POWERS — What is it about the city that keeps it alive for you?

ANH DUONG — The diversity and the meritocracy. New York is not defined by its past. Most people are moving here to invent themselves — all coming from different backgrounds, races, and cultures. It's the hardest city to make it in, but it will support your dreams or at least give you a chance. Nothing is too big or too crazy. I grew up in Paris, where history can be overwhelming. As an artist, being

surrounded by so much beauty and history can be intimidating. I find myself more in a state of contemplation when I am in Paris, whereas in New York City, you have to keep going — you have to create your own world and beauty. It's like a blank canvas where everything is possible.

BILL POWERS — When did you first move to Manhattan?

ANH DUONG — In 1988. I came as a young model to do the Christian Lacroix couture show. It was the biggest fashion show at the moment. Lacroix made couture cool. We took over the Bergdorf Goodman windows and were on the cover of The New York Times and Time magazine. I came for a week and fell in love with an artist, Julian Schnabel, and I stayed.

BILL POWERS — How has it changed for you over the years?

ANH DUONG — When I first came to New York, SoHo lofts were very cheap, and most people were afraid to live in SoHo. On my second visit, I stayed for three months at the Chelsea Hotel. It was the coolest place to be, filled with the ghosts of so many great NYC legends. As a young Parisian girl, it was like being in a movie. I remember the lobby was always occupied by strange characters, and we used to eat paella at El Quijote, the Spanish place next door. Then I moved to the West Village, close to the river and the meat market. It was considered wild and dangerous — mostly artists, gays, and prostitutes. The biggest change has been Downtown, when suddenly every banker wanted to live like an artist in a loft. That changed the landscape of Manhattan. The real estate went up, and most young artists had to move away. Only fashion stores and luxurious lofts — Downtown lost part of its soul. I'm glad we didn't have the pressure of self-promoting. Nowadays, so much time is spent in promoting and so little time in creating the body of work. Promoting has become the art, not the work. We wanted to live amazing experiences. Success was the side effect — it wasn't the focus. Although I was always ambitious, it was the hunger for experience that drove us, not promoting oneself. The art world was so small, especially for a young model coming from Paris. It was unheard of at the time to come from fashion and switch to the art world. At first, I had to sacrifice my modeling career and pretend it had never happened in order to be taken seriously, but then the world caught up, and because I was an artist, they asked me to represent brands, and since then it hasn't stopped. We tend to forget how the two worlds were separated. It wasn't an easy transition. Also, the role model of an artist was a guy. It was at a time when Georg Baselitz was proud to declare, "Women make bad painters" and was celebrated for saying it. I remember going to my first opening at Sperone Westwater in 1991, dressed up in the latest fashion. That was scrutinized, but I didn't want to care and bend to men's rules, and I wanted to glorify the feminine. I always believed that the two worlds could interact and feed each other, but I was ahead of my



VILLA MAGDALENA

time.

BILL POWERS — Do you have a New York experience that sums up the feeling of living here?

ANH DUONG — When I lived in the West Village, I had a loft a block away from Roy Lichtenstein. I would go visit him, and he would visit me and look at my work. It was a time when artists would visit each other's studios, unlike now, when we are isolated and guarded.

BILL POWERS — How would you describe your paintings?

ANH DUONG — They are portraits of my subconscious. An ongoing personal narrative and a record of my psychological journey. I believe one becomes an artist from a need or a failure. That need is from one's inability to express oneself in the world — so, you have to find new ways to process this excess of emotions, in the hope that the viewer will connect with you. I started to paint as a kid to share my feelings because I couldn't do it any other way. Over the years, it saved my sanity. Every work of an artist is a self-portrait. As a young ballerina and model, I was a muse to many artists, so when I started to paint, it became natural to use myself to reappropriate my image, to become my own muse. What I like about using the same subject matter is that it disappears through repetition. It allows me to focus on painting a feeling rather than a likeness. It really doesn't matter what I'm painting. The subject is nothing in itself. What matters is all that can be said about life via the subject. It is on the canvas that I am most free and least self-conscious, where I feel safe being intimate.

BILL POWERS — Does your art reflect your time here?

ANH DUONG — Absolutely. New York has given me the permission and inspiration to be an artist. I feel more inspired to paint in the chaos of the city than in beautiful nature. The intensity and the drive of the city force you to create in order to survive the madness and to keep your head above water. In nature, I tend to become lazy and in a state of contemplation with no need to create because nature is perfect. In my work, I realize months or years later what the painting could tell me about myself, a mirror of my emotional state, reflecting back what I am going through. I would have a dream or a desire to paint something, and that painting would tell me what I was feeling at that time and where I was. It's like connecting the different parts of my brain.

ANNA PARK

BILL POWERS — Why did you move to New York?

ANNA PARK — I moved to New York from Utah in 2015. I originally came to study at Pratt Institute as an illustration major. I was a very angsty kid growing up in Utah and wished to be in an environment that was the opposite of the one I grew up in.

BILL POWERS — What was your first impression?

ANNA PARK — I remember coming to visit New York with my family a few years prior to moving here and absolutely loving it. We were in the sweltering heat of the summer, but I had never felt more drawn to a city. This was a place where I finally felt at home.

BILL POWERS — What do you dislike about the city?

ANNA PARK — There's not much I don't like about it. Even the dirtiness and grime — I've grown to feel comfortable with them. Something I still can't get used to is the colony of rats around my studio.

BILL POWERS — How has your art-making been impacted by New York?

ANNA PARK — There's something about the energy of the city that impacts the way I make work here. It's straddling both the chaotic distractions and the immense highs New York offers, which provide a place for ideas to flow. Not to mention that whenever I feel as though I'm in a rut creatively, I decompress by going to see art shows, which are so accessible in the city.

BILL POWERS — Is it truly the city that never sleeps? Doesn't everything that dreams need to sleep?

ANNA PARK — It's really what you make of it. Pockets of New York have a lively energy, but the city also offers quieter moments that come as a relief.

BILL POWERS — Did you have any misconceptions about New York before you got here?

ANNA PARK — I was always told before moving here that people were brash and rude, but having lived here for the past seven years, I've realized it's quite the opposite. I've met the most genuine and down-to-earth people here and friends who are like family now. I imagine the stereotype comes from the fact that everyone is no-nonsense and doesn't want to waste time — which can be misconstrued as rude. But I find the directness refreshing. The city attracts people who are hungry to be here, and that passion is what I find compelling.



VILLA MAGDALENA

BILL POWERS — What has been your quintessential New York moment?

ANNA PARK — As cheesy as it sounds, I still look out onto the New York skyline whenever I'm crossing the bridge to go into Manhattan. It still hits me how surreal it is to be living here.

MIE YIM

ANFISA VRUBEL — You were born in South Korea. How did you end up in New York?

MIE YIM — My mother and I migrated from South Korea to the US when I was 12 years old, and I grew up in Hawaii. Hawaii was a beautiful and strange experience. But I was craving stimulation that Hawaii didn't have, and I knew that New York was the antithesis of that. I associated New York with civilization and culture and stimulation. When I was in high school, I asked my mother if I could go to Parsons summer school, and she allowed me. I took a yellow taxi from the airport, and I came out near the Empire State Building, and I just looked up and down 5th Avenue, and I felt at home. All these people in suits were walking to work. I hadn't seen people in suits. [Laughs]

ANFISA VRUBEL — Does your Korean background figure into your art?

MIE YIM — Korea has moved on without me. Even though I have relatives who live there, culturally and artistically I feel very disconnected from it, and that goes back to my work. Maybe if I can't connect to it in that way, I can connect to it through my art. My earlier work was much more figurative. I felt like I had to have an agenda, a statement of what kind of art I wanted to make. Slowly, I moved away from that into abstraction. Today, it's more amalgamated to Western culture. I feel like my name alone is enough of a statement now, so I don't feel the need to scream, "Hey, look at my Asian culture heritage in my work." I like that now it's kind of buried underneath.

ANFISA VRUBEL — And how has New York influenced your work?

MIE YIM — Just by the fact of seeing art that's being created. It's so expensive and hard to live in this city, and I'll be damned if I just go to my studio and go home. I want to use the city as much as I can. I'm not consciously influenced by contemporary art, but I'm sucked up by that energy and also the competitiveness. Not competing like, "I want to be better than you." We do it together, and that

feeling is very energizing. It takes guts to live here. So, I bring that energy to my studio.

ANFISA VRUBEL — How would you describe New York's spirit?

MIE YIM — New York is a magical city. It has gone through ups and downs, but it's relentless. You step outside, and anything can happen. That kind of excitement is pretty rare.

ANFISA VRUBEL — Do you think of your practice as part of a larger community, or is it more independent?

MIE YIM — You can be like a monk and go from home to studio, studio to home. I did that for years when I was transitioning from figuration to abstraction. I didn't really socialize or engage with other people. But now I feel I'm very active in the community. I work in my studio and go to openings and have studio visits with other artists. Even if you're not showing, you're part of the engine.

ANFISA VRUBEL — Who are some of the artists that you admire?

MIE YIM — My biggest influence, someone who I think about all the time, is Philip Guston, who was a New Yorker. Artists like Ruth Asawa and Yayoi Kusama are just badass. I love that Kusama thought big and knew she was going to have an empire, and she did it. There are many female artists who are working now — young, contemporary artists — and this is going to change the system. I think we're going to look back 10 or 20 years from now, and a few of them will go down in the canon of art history.

BAMBOU GILI

ANFISA VRUBEL — Were you born in New York?

BAMBOU GILI — I was born and raised in New York. I spent my entire childhood on the Lower East Side, and I went to university in New York before moving to Brooklyn. I moved to New Mexico three months ago. I love New York so much, but I felt like I owed it to myself to experience something drastically different. I really wanted to move somewhere that had an insane landscape. Seeing a mountain every day is very inspirational and freeing.

ANFISA VRUBEL — How has New York inspired your work?

BAMBOU GILI — Growing up in New York sparked a deep love and yearning for landscapes, nature, and wide-open spaces, which are lacking in the city. I started creating portals for myself so that I could travel somewhere else, as



VILLA MAGDALENA

opposed to feeling kind of restless in the city. One of the main things that I absolutely loved about New York was the Museum of Natural History. Walking through the museum really felt like I had traveled through six continents in one afternoon.

ANFISA VRUBEL — What's your cultural background?

BAMBOU GILI — Both of my parents are French, and they migrated to New York, where they met. My mother is Vietnamese but was born in Paris. As an Asian-American woman, my background is something that I definitely navigate in my personal life.

ANFISA VRUBEL — Is your work processing some elements of your Asian culture and heritage?

BAMBOU GILI — One of my main influences is Hayao Miyazaki and Studio Ghibli. His films have amazing, strong-willed feminine characters that are thrust into strange worlds that they have to navigate. Each one has a unique kindness and empathy for their surroundings and for the characters that they encounter, and they always come out with an intense self-determination that I admire. Miyazaki was amazing at creating landscapes that felt like an endless world, one that you feel completely immersed in. And that's something that really informed my practice.

ANFISA VRUBEL — How has it been navigating the cultural landscape of New York as a young female artist?

BAMBOU GILI — Oh, it has been great. Growing up in New York and being in the arts has been fantastic. There's such a wealth of knowledge. There's a huge artistic community that I have the pleasure of working around. New York is one of the best places for people-watching, and I feel like a lot of my characters have stemmed from people I've observed.

ANFISA VRUBEL — How would you describe New York's spirit?

BAMBOU GILI — I feel like the New York spirit is the art of minding your own fucking business. A lot of weird shit happens in the city, and you can always tell a New Yorker because they're just completely unfazed. A

ANFISA VRUBEL — Do you think of your practice as part of a larger community, or is it more independent?

BAMBOU GILI — I actually love my solitude, being alone in my studio and diving into my interests. But I also had the privilege of working in a fantastic studio building in Brooklyn with other Asian female artists whom I admire as artists and

as people, like Anna Park, Sasha Gordon, Amanda Ba, and Dominique Fung. I feel like there's definitely this graduating class of phenomenal young female artists that I'm very honored to be a part of.

ANFISA VRUBEL — Which artists do you admire?

BAMBOU GILI — Alice Neel is a pillar of New York. A few of my favorites are Marlene Dumas, Nicole Eisenman, Lisa Yuskavage, Sanya Kantarovsky, Kerry James Marshall, Miriam Cahn, Chris Ofili, Peter Doig, and Robert Colescott. The work of these artists has really made a lasting impression on me. Seeing their works for the first time was just unreal.

JIN JEONG

BILL POWERS — Growing up in South Korea, what was your vision of New York at that time?

JIN JEONG — I imagined it was the most expensive and coolest city. I probably thought all of New York was like one big SoHo. I knew it from TV shows like Gossip Girl and Sex and the City. But coming from Seoul, I also knew that I could handle a big city.

BILL POWERS — Why did you move to New York?

JIN JEONG — I was living in Chicago in my mid-20s, attending the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, but I kind of outgrew the city. Since my sophomore year, I had been thinking about going to Hunter College in New York for my MFA.

BILL POWERS — What's the craziest thing that has happened to you in New York?

JIN JEONG — There are just so many weird people here, and everyone is seemingly unfazed by it. A lady could be screaming on the street, and New Yorkers just keep walking. It's only the tourists who are shocked. I felt like a meerkat when I first arrived, always searching around. Out of place. Now I'm more of an alley cat.

BILL POWERS — Do you think people have misconceptions about New Yorkers?

JIN JEONG — People think New Yorkers are mean, but actually we are just too busy to get caught up in other people's drama. It's the best kind of indifference. You have to earn their attention.

BILL POWERS — You have defined your paintings as



VILLA MAGDALENA

emotional landscapes. Does living in New York change that current of emotion running through the work?

JIN JEONG — I think the “emotional” component of my landscapes isn’t so much about my internal state but instead encourages the viewer to explore their feelings. I am just a conduit. I try to be very neutral while I’m making the work.

BILL POWERS — Are there any New York artists you admire?

JIN JEONG — Helen Frankenthaler for her soak-stain painting technique, which I use in my paintings. The first time I saw a Rothko in person, I cried. And then I owe a debt to Katherine Bradford for changing my palette.