

## Making New Worlds: Li Yuan-chia & Friends

11 November 2023 –  
18 February 2024

Press view: 10 November  
2023, 10.45am – 1pm



Li Yuan-chia, *Untitled*, 1993, hand-coloured black and white print.  
Courtesy Li Yuan-chia Foundation.

Kettle's Yard is pleased to present 'Making New Worlds: Li Yuan-chia & Friends', the first exhibition to celebrate the artist, poet and arts organiser Li Yuan-chia (1929–1994) and the profound impact that his LYC Museum and Art Gallery had upon the history of British art.

From 1972–1983, in the village of Banks in Cumbria, the LYC offered an experimental space for showing and making art. Li exhibited and worked alongside more than 300 artists there including Lygia Clark, Delia Derbyshire, Andy Goldsworthy, Madelon Hooykaas, David Nash, Winifred Nicholson, Elsa Stansfield and Shelagh Wakely. This exhibition will bring Li's own practice into dialogue with those in the LYC creative network, drawing parallels between the museum and Kettle's Yard, both spaces motivated by a shared belief in the inseparability of art, life and friendship. Three new commissions from contemporary artists Aaron Tan (b. 1989, Singapore), Grace Ndiritu (b. 1982, UK) and Charwei Tsai (b. 1980, Taiwan) will speak to the enduring influence of Li's social and artistic legacy, and the importance of resurfacing a story that has been obscured.

This exhibition will survey Li's boundary-defying practice, which reached its apotheosis with the LYC. Li was born in Guangxi, China, and studied in Taipei where he jointly founded the Ton-Fan collective, a group of pioneering artistic outliers known as Taiwan's first abstractionists. An important artist of the mid-century avant-garde, Li was invited to exhibit internationally in the 4th São Paulo Bienal (1957), with the *Il Punto*

collective in Milan (1961), at the influential Signals Gallery in London (1965) and in the company of Derek Jarman and Yoko Ono in the newly opened Lisson Gallery (1967). Experimenting with ink painting, calligraphy, kinetic sculpture, photography and performance, he found his way to Cumbria in 1967 where he developed a close friendship with Winifred Nicholson and purchased an old farmhouse she owned to create the LYC. The museum became an extension of Li's art making and can be considered his most expansive artwork. After the LYC closed in 1983, he remained in Cumbria, using the site as a backdrop for a renewed independent practice.

'Making New Worlds' will open with an introduction to the museum's location near Hadrian's Wall. Here Winifred Nicholson's *Roman Road (Landscape with Two Houses)* (1926), part of the Kettle's Yard collection, will situate visitors on the path to the LYC, alongside new installations by Grace Ndiritu and Aaron Tan.

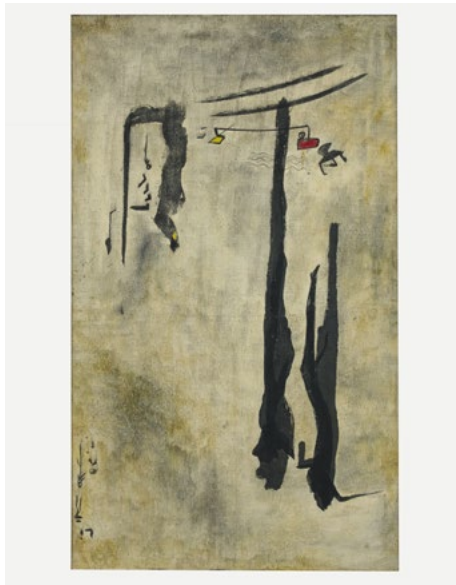
The exhibition's first chapter will begin with an exploration of Li's early work and interests in spirituality, technology and ecology, illustrated through his concept of the 'cosmic point'. In this space, visitors will encounter examples of Li's calligraphy and ink paintings, alongside his increasingly minimal works on paper, sculptures and installations. Works by artists who engaged with the cosmic and other unseen forces in the mid-twentieth century will also be shown in this section, including Hsiao Chin's painting *Rising Sun* (1961), Liliane Lijn's kinetic sculpture *Cosmic Flares* (1965–6) and a work from Takis' multimedia *Signal* series (1968). A selection

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and images**

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Li Yuan-chia, *Untitled*, c.1960, ink on rice paper.  
Courtesy Li Yuan-chia Foundation



Winifred Nicholson, *Roman Road (Landscape with Two Houses)*, 1926.  
© Trustees of Winifred Nicholson.



Liliane Lijn, *Cosmic Flares II*, 1966, polymer lenses on Perspex in painted metal frame, lights and detachable programmed digital switching controller. © Liliane Lijn. All Rights Reserved, DACS 2023 / Photo by Richard Wilding, 2015

of Winifred Nicholson's prismatic paintings, made later in her career when she frequented the LYC, will also be displayed along with Charwei Tsai's video *Circles II* (2009) which incorporates calligraphic, circular forms in the spirit of the cosmic point.

The second gallery will take its cue from the LYC motto, 'Space | Time | Life', exploring Li's textiles, hand-tinted photographs and sculptural reliefs through themes of home, belonging and nature. Visitors will encounter two textile wall hangings, which Li painted and gifted to friends to use as draught excluders, as well as Shelagh Wakely's floor-based installation *Towards the inside of a container* (1979). A set of shelves reminiscent of those in the LYC and Kettle's Yard house will display smaller sculptures, works on paper and archival material by artists including Audrey Barker, Thetis Blacker, Mira Schendel, Barbara Hepworth and Ian Hamilton-Finlay – many of whom exhibited at the LYC or adopted his philosophies around the world. This gallery will also celebrate the creative practices that Li energised through friendship and collaboration, demonstrated by a newly restored window that David Nash made for the museum in 1979, and a sound collage by David Butler, based on the work of innovative composer Delia Derbyshire who lived and worked at the LYC in 1976.

'Making New Worlds' will expand into the Kettle's Yard research space with a selection of archival films and materials drawn from Li's papers at the Rylands Library, University of Manchester, alongside Aaron Tan's multimedia sculptural work modelled after the LYC kitchen cabinets (2022). A satellite display at West Court Gallery, Jesus College, Cambridge, will be dedicated to Li's calligraphy and works on paper made throughout his career. The exhibition will further be accompanied by a public programme including screenings, performances and a symposium realised in collaboration with the [Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art](#) and [Wysing Art Centre](#).

The exhibition has been organised by Kettle's Yard with the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, London, and will be accompanied by a new illustrated publication with essays by the exhibition's curators Hammad Nasar, Sarah Victoria Turner and Amy Tobin.

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**About Kettle's Yard**

Kettle's Yard, part of the University of Cambridge, is a leading gallery and unique house with a remarkable collection of 20th-century art. Its founders Jim and Helen Ede believed in art's ability to transform lives, a vision upheld today through critically acclaimed exhibitions, pioneering community and learning programmes, and research of the highest quality. Our aim is to offer an inspiring and enriching experience for everyone who visits. Find out more and get involved at: [www.kettlesyard.co.uk](http://www.kettlesyard.co.uk)

**About the Paul Mellon Centre**

The Paul Mellon Centre is an educational charity that champions new ways of understanding British art history and culture. We publish, teach and carry out research, both at the Centre in London and through our online platforms. Our archives, library and lively events programme are open to researchers, students and the public. The Centre's grants and fellowships programme supports institutions and individuals with research projects, publications, exhibitions and events. Through all areas of our work, we promote activities that enhance and expand knowledge about British art and architecture. The Centre was founded in 1970 by the art collector and philanthropist Paul Mellon. It is part of Yale University and a partner to the Yale Center for British Art.

**About Hammad Nasar**

Hammad Nasar is a curator, writer, researcher and strategic advisor. He is presently Senior Research Fellow, Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art in London. Earlier he was Lead Curator, Herbert Art Gallery & Museum (Coventry); Executive Director of the Stuart Hall Foundation, London; Head of Research & Programmes at Asia Art Archive, Hong Kong; Principal Research Fellow, UAL Decolonising Arts Institute, and co-founded Green Cardamom, London. His most recent exhibitions include *British Art Show 9*, Turner Prize (2021), *Speech Acts: Reflection-Imagination-Repetition* (2018-19) and *Rock, Paper, Scissors: Positions in Play – the UAE's pavilion at the 57th Venice Biennale* (2017). He was awarded an MBE for services to the arts in 2023.

**About Sarah Victoria Turner**

Sarah Victoria Turner is an art historian, curator and writer. She is Director of the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art in London, which is part of Yale University, and has taught art history at the University of York and the Courtauld Institute of Art in London. Sarah is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts. She is the founding co-editor of *British Art Studies*, an award-winning digital arts publication.

**About Amy Tobin**

Amy Tobin is Curator, contemporary programmes at Kettle's Yard and Associate Professor in the Department of History of Art, University of Cambridge. Her research addresses histories of collaboration, collectivity and solidarity – particularly in relation to feminism – in modern and contemporary art. Her book *Women Artists Together: Art in the Age of Women's Liberation* is published by Yale University Press.



Li Yuan Chia in his studio at the LYC Museum and Art Gallery, Brampton, Cumbria, 1969. Demarco Digital Archive, University of Dundee & Richard Demarco Archive

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