



Yang Fudong: Fragrant River

Released November 21, 2025

UCCA Center for Contemporary Art presents “Yang Fudong: Fragrant River” from November 22, 2025, to May 31, 2026, the artist’s first institutional solo in Beijing. Anchored by a newly completed, 15-channel video installation of the same title, named after the artist’s hometown near Beijing, the exhibition brings together a selection of Yang’s most recent creations alongside early works. Through a constellation of media, “Yang Fudong: Fragrant River” explores the layered perceptions of time, growth, and memory, unfolding a rich set of metaphorical scenarios interwoven with personal emotion, shared memory, and historical temporality.

Exhibition Period:

2025.11.22 – 2026.5.31

Location:

UCCA Beijing

Great Hall

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BEIJING, China—From November 22, 2025, to May 31, 2026, UCCA Center for Contemporary Art presents “Yang Fudong: Fragrant River,” the first institutional solo exhibition in Beijing by the celebrated Chinese contemporary artist. Marking Yang Fudong’s (b. 1971, Beijing) most comprehensive presentation to date, the exhibition features six newly created video works, a large-scale painting installation, a furniture-and-video installation, and a selection of early paintings, videos, and archival materials. Through the reconstruction of fragmented memory, the estrangement of lived reality, the re-fictionalization of image-based narratives, and the symbolic construction of spatial environments, Yang transforms UCCA’s Great Hall into a stage set in temporal dislocation—an experience at once theatrical and uncannily remote, in which past and present, emotion and reality, intertwine and unfold in shifting configurations. This exhibition is co-curated by UCCA Director Philip Tinari and UCCA Curator Chelsea Qianxi Liu.

Press material available at

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Widely regarded as one of the most significant figures to emerge from China’s contemporary art scene in the twenty-first century, Yang Fudong is known for a distinctive narrative approach and a highly aestheticized visual language. His works often draw together the poetics of Eastern philosophy, the idioms of modern cinema, and the visual logic of contemporary culture. Employing slow, extended takes, fragmented plotlines, and a lyrical yet restrained image quality, Yang’s creations hold an aesthetic tension that hovers between dream and reality. The artist describes his method as “the cinema of implication,” constructing emotional circuits through rhythm, breath, and sustained gaze, inviting viewers to experience a meditative flow of thought as they watch. In his work, time is decomposed and dilated into a perceptible spiritual dimension, while film itself becomes a living organism—its grain, flickering light, and mechanical sound manifesting time in tangible form.



The exhibition's title, "Fragrant River," is the literal translation of Yang Fudong's hometown—Xianghe County in Hebei Province. Yet within the exhibition, the artist dissolves its literal geographic reference, abstracting it into a metaphor interwoven with personal sentiment, collective memory, and historical time. At the center of the exhibition is the 15-channel black-and-white video installation *Fragrant River* (2016–2025), a work that reflects more than twenty-five years of conceptualization and artistic practice. The idea first emerged in 1997, shortly after Yang completed his debut feature *An Estranged Paradise*. In 2016, the artist and his team filmed for 47 days in Xianghe's county seat and surrounding villages, with post-production continuing until the autumn of 2025.

The work unfolds around the daily life of a young mother preparing for Spring Festival celebrations. Fragmented scenes of birth, aging, and death appear alongside depictions of manual labor and communal life, presenting a northern Chinese rural landscape that is at once deeply real and strangely unfamiliar as it shifts through light and shadow. Time is measured through repetitive work, while moments of the surreal open onto another temporal dimension, brief apertures resembling ruptures in a dream.

Fragrant River is at once a spiritual return to the terrain of personal growth and homesickness, and a sustained meditation on time itself. Fifteen screens are dispersed across nine interlocking, nested chambers, forming a labyrinth of memory. As viewers navigate these spaces, their movement becomes a means through which time unfolds, positioning them as participants within the work's narrative structure. The exhibition also includes a documentary on the making of this work, offering insight into how the artist transforms personal recollections into moving-image narratives that resonate with shared human emotion. As the inaugural chapter of Yang's long-term "Library Film Project," *Fragrant River* serves as a point of entry into the artist's expansive inquiry into the inner life of the individual. The works assembled within this framework comprise an intensely personal catalogue of images, while remaining open, waiting to be read by each viewer.

Alongside the titular work, the exhibition debuts five further new works, which alongside a selection of earlier pieces, which collectively reflect the artist's ongoing inquiry into the relationship between image, memory, and life. *Young Man, Young Man* (2025), a five-channel video installation shot on 16mm color film, reconstructs, in a dispersed and nonlinear manner, fragments of Yang's youth growing up in a military residential compound in Beijing during the 1980s. The boys in the film run, practice martial arts, wait for buses, swim, and walk through



cornfields, as if inhabiting a long summer that will never end. Here, Yang reflects on how moving images hold memory: moments of innocence, longing, and solitude become suspended within the material trace of celluloid. Also shot on 16mm color film, the single-channel work *At the Summer Palace* (2024–2025) follows a man and a young boy as they wander through the grounds of the Summer Palace. Time quietly slips out-of-joint, like a half-waking dream on a languid afternoon. In the single-channel *County Magistrate, County Magistrate* (2024–2025), an unspecified collective migration unfolds. Villagers move along mountain paths at dusk, while empty homes retain the warmth of recent habitation—history and the present moment converge into an imagined local chronicle of home. In *Backyard - Hey! Sun is Rising* (2001), men dressed in old military uniforms wander through the early hours of a city, as if sleepwalking, reflecting Yang’s early explorations of how moving images can give form to mood and dream.

The exhibition also features a 15-panel installation comprising painting, media, and photography. *Private Notes from a Land of Bliss* (2025) is inspired by *Elegant Gathering in the Western Garden*, a handscroll by Southern Song painter Ma Yuan. Employing a highly personal visual language, Yang evokes the classical motif of the literati excursion, echoing the labyrinthine setting of *Fragrant River* situated at the other end of the gallery. The sequential logic of the fragmented images corresponds to the traditional mode of viewing a handscroll segment by segment, yet it also recalls the structure of film: discrete yet continuous shots. The work constitutes another chapter in Yang’s ongoing exploration of what he terms “painterly cinema.”

The installation *Breastfeeding* (2025) centers on pieces of old furniture and television sets commonly found in the Xianghe area during the 1980s and 1990s, extending private memory into an embodied, spatial form. Covered with mirrors and glass in varying degrees of opacity, the furniture creates an environment that resembles an expanded domestic interior—subtle, shifting, and unmoored from chronological time—inviting viewers into a space where memory and image fold into one another. Vintage cathode-ray televisions placed on the pieces of furniture play video footage recorded by Yang on his visits home to Xianghe from Shanghai in the early 2000s, the unstaged imagery forming a sort of precursor to *Fragrant River*.

The exhibition architecture takes shape through symbolic spatial typologies—“maze,” “city tower,” and “square”—rendered in gradients of black, white, and layered greys, forming a setting that is at once structured and poetic. Rejecting a prescribed viewing route, Yang orchestrates a multi-directional spatial layout that encourages viewers to wander, double



back, or even lose their sense of orientation, moving through a field with no fixed beginning or end. The use of light further intensifies this experience of temporal dislocation, aligning the narrative of the image with the narrative of space to suggest a form of sensory perception that is blurred and multi-dimensional. The exhibition design is led by UCCA Exhibition Designer Anna Xiaoran.

“Yang Fudong: Fragrant River” unfolds as a moving-image epic of time, memory, and the deep currents of inner life. With his distinctive sense of restraint and luminous sensitivity, Yang renders time newly perceptible—written and rewritten through image and rhythm—allowing personal recollections and historical traces to be laid out, reexamined, and reimagined. In doing so, his work extends contemporary art as a practice marked by poetic sensibility and philosophical depth.

About the Artist

Yang Fudong (b. 1971, Beijing; lives and works in Shanghai) graduated from the Department of Oil Painting at the China Academy of Art in Hangzhou. He has been the subject of solo exhibitions at institutions and galleries worldwide, including “Endless Peaks” (ShanghART, Shanghai, 2020); “Dawn Breaking” (Long Museum (West Bund), Shanghai, 2018); “Moving Mountains” (Shanghai Center of Photography, Shanghai, 2016); “Twin Tracks: Yang Fudong Solo Exhibition” (Yuz Museum, Shanghai, 2015); “The Light That I Feel” (SALT, Sandhornoya, 2014); “Yang Fudong: Estranged Paradise, Works 1993-2013” (Kunsthalle Zurich, Zurich, 2013); “The Works of Yang Fudong: Quote Out of Context” (OCT Contemporary Art Terminal, Shanghai, 2012); “Yang Fudong: One Half of August” (Parasol Unit Foundation for Contemporary Art, London, 2011); “Yang Fudong: Seven Intellectuals in a Bamboo Forest and Other Stories” (National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens, 2010); “Dawn Mist, Separation Faith: Yang Fudong’s Solo Exhibition” (Zendai Museum of Modern Art, Shanghai, 2009); “Yang Fudong: The General’s Smile” (Hara Museum, Tokyo, 2008); “Yang Fudong: Don’t Worry, It Will Be Better...” (Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna, 2005); “Yang Fudong” (Castello di Rivoli Museo d’arte contemporanea, Turin, 2005); and “Five Films” (The Renaissance Society, Chicago, 2004).

Additionally, his works have been featured in major international exhibitions at venues including The Suzhou Museum (2019); Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (2017); Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris (2016); the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (2013); Tate Liverpool (2007); Tate Modern, London (2004); and Centre Pompidou, Paris (2003). His works have also been included in the Lyon Biennale (2013); Sharjah Biennial 11 (2013); the



17th Biennale of Sydney (2010); the 52nd Venice Biennale (2007); the 5th Asia-Pacific Triennial (2006); FACT Liverpool Biennial (2004); the 50th Venice Biennale (2003); Documenta 11 (2002); the 4th Shanghai Biennale (2002); and the 7th Istanbul Biennial (2001), among others.

Public Programs

UCCA has organized a series of public programs to accompany the exhibition, offering audiences new perspectives and deepened understanding on Yang Fudong's artistic practice. On the opening day, UCCA Director Philip Tinari and Curator Chelsea Qianxi Liu will lead a walkthrough of the exhibition, sharing insights into the curatorial approach and the ideas underlying the works. This will be followed by a conversation between the artist, Philip Tinari, Chelsea Qianxi Liu, and Ute Meta Bauer, Professor at the School of Art, Design, and Media, NTU, beginning with "Fragrant River" then delving into Yang's creative process and distinctive cinematic language.

An analog filmmaking workshop led by Yang's frequent collaborator, cinematographer Hu Chen, will invite guide participants to experiment hands-on with shooting and film manipulation exercises, discovering the tactile textures and unique materialities of the medium. In *A Drift Between Image and Music*, musician Jin Wang—Yang's long-term collaborator—will guide participants in an improvisational workshop that interweaves sound and moving image to create an immersive, sensory experience.

During the exhibition period, UCCA will also present a series of academic conversations on "Fragrant River," taking Yang Fudong's artistic practice as a point of departure to explore themes such as poetics and nostalgia, time and memory, and the local and the global. The series will examine the aesthetic and conceptual significance of Yang's work within the context of contemporary art. The Cinema Arts program "Where Images Take Place," featuring three sessions of screenings and dialogues, will continue the exhibition's critical reflections on modernization and urban construction, investigating how generational memory is transmitted and reconfigured across historical time while deepening the inquiry into the perception of moving images.

Support and Sponsorship

UCCA thanks lead sponsor Louis Vuitton. Exclusive wall solutions support is provided by Dulux, and Genelec contributed exclusive audio equipment and technical support. UCCA also thanks the members of UCCA Foundation Council, International Circle, and Young



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UCCA Center for Contemporary Art is China's premier museum of modern and contemporary art. Committed to the belief that art can deepen lives and transcend boundaries, UCCA presents a wide range of exhibitions, public programs, and educational initiatives across four architecturally and programmatically distinct locations. Owned by a group of committed patrons, it is funded by donations, sponsorship, ticketing, and proceeds from the commercial activities of UCCA Lab. UCCA has presented more than 200 exhibitions and welcomed more than ten million visitors since its founding in Beijing in 2007 as the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art.

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