ALMINE RECH

Sylvia Ong
The Light Between Us

Nov 14, 2024 — Jan 11, 2025 | Brussels

Almine Rech Brussels is pleased to present "The Light Between Us," Sylvia Ong's first solo exhibition with the gallery, on view from November 14, 2024 to January 11, 2025.

"Can art really illuminate hope in the world?" This question lies at the heart of Sylvia Ong's latest series of paintings. In her debut exhibition at Almine Rech, the self-taught artist collaborates with composer Joanna Bieńkowska, who uses the moniker YANA, to contend with whether art can make an impact in our tumultuous world.

With a background in cinematography, performing arts, theater, and music, Ong traverses a multitude of artistic genres to create vignettes of lyrical expressionism that harmonize color and texture with sound. Music and its strong ties to her emotions had been an integral part of her practice long before she realized that she experiences synesthesia, which causes people to see colors, shapes, or movement in response to musical stimuli. For Ong, her strong emotional reaction to music allows her to experience colors and shapes in her mind.

Her artistic process begins in daylight with music and meditation before she sketches preliminary ideas in color pencil and marker. These drawings are then refined on canvas, layer by meticulous layer, gradually building upon her surface with oil paint, oil stick, and graphite. Before landing on her current materials of choice, Ong began painting with acrylic. Years later, she switched to oil paint thanks to its luminous quality and ability to reflect and refract light, a key motif in her latest body of work.

When Ong approached YANA about creating an EP for 'The Light Between Us', she delivered six tracks that chart a journey of introspection through the heaviness of life. Ong does not credit her synesthesia as the motivator behind her work with instrumentalists, but Schumann resonances—the naturally occurring energy frequencies that arise from the earth. Nature and the interconnectedness of life via frequencies and sound energy are the forces that inspire her.

"The Light Between Us" opens with *Natsukashii* (2024), inspired by the second track of YANA's EP. Bathed in glowing pink with streaks of warm orange, the painting with its radiant color palette is the antithesis of what viewers expect from a meditation on feelings of hopelessness in the face of an uncertain future. Always striving to strike a balance between spontaneity and preplanned direction, Ong approached *Natsukashii* with the aim of conveying a sense of nostalgia for the past, tentative hope for the future, and a tinge of melancholy. It is not until *Silent Fields No. 1* (2024) that a darker color palette of blue hues rises to the surface. Piercing the frenetic composition are flashes of white that come to dominate the scene in *Silent Fields No. 2* (2024). The beams of sunlight suggested in these two works manifest in the titles of accompanying paintings *Hollow Sun No. 1*, *Hollow Sun No. 2*, and *Guiding Light (Diptych)* (all 2024). All three works see shades of green, yellow, and brown subsume the canvas—allusions to the natural world that offers temporary reprieve from life's hardships for Ong. While *Hollow Sun No. 1* resembles an abstracted representation of vegetation sprouting from fertile ground, a dirt path can be made out in the foreground of *Guiding Light (Diptych)* along with a bright clearing composed of a blur of magenta against a white background. Sharing its name with the third track on YANA's EP, *Guiding Light* features streams of sunlight that mimic the string instruments that gently fade in and out of YANA's song.

The exhibition concludes with works such as *Good Morning, Midnight* (2024), in which the interplay between light and darkness, as embodied by the title, is offered as a potential resolution to the role that art and artists can play during difficult global times. Much like the process of Ong and YANA collaborating over shared feelings of despair on a macro scale, “The Light Between Us” suggests that connection is the salve that can retrieve us from pits of darkness.

- Harley Wong