

Press Release

Lin Yusi “Thus Have I heard”

July 5 (Sat) - August 9 (Sat), 2025

Tokyo Gallery + BTAP | Tokyo

Tokyo Gallery + BTAP is pleased to present “Thus Have I heard,” the first solo exhibition in Japan by Chinese artist Lin Yusi, opening July 5, 2025.

Lin was born in 1978 in Guangdong, China. He graduated from the Chinese Painting Department of the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts and grew up surrounded by calligraphy and painting, deeply influenced by traditional culture. A master of the diverse techniques found in Chinese painting, such as freehand *xieyi* brush work, the meticulous realism of the *gongbi* style, and *baimiao* line drawing, he works with a variety of motifs, including landscapes, flowers and birds, and human figures. As a next-generation artist from the academy school, Lin has been exploring the artistic possibilities of “new ink” in his own unique way, straddling the three major categories of Chinese ink painting: tradition, academy, and experimentation.

This exhibition, “Thus Have I heard,” is a retrospective that seeks to trace the artist’s personal growth and creative trajectory. The title is taken from a Buddhist scripture, a phrase that symbolizes Lin’s approach towards reexamining the world through his own life and art. Growing up at a time when communication technology had barely developed, Lin obtained much of his information “by ear” as a child. The “stories he heard” and legends told to him by adults became the source of his visual images, and exerted a profound influence on his creations. Lin draws on such memories to fashion invisible, fantastic narratives with delicate brushstrokes, continuing to question the essential nature of art by practicing both ancient and modern techniques with his own hands. For him, the boundary between fiction and reality is part and parcel of life, while art should exist within the context of an accumulation of daily exploration and experimentation.

This exhibition introduces Lin’s artistic approach to ink and the thinking behind it through three series.

◆ *Tulpa* (imaginary friends that have been deliberately created)

This is a “new ink” series that represents some of Lin’s most iconic works, consisting of pieces that he has continued to paint for more than 20 years. Layers of delicate brush strokes and blotches come together to create natural landscapes that are fantastic yet realistic. The human figures and animals in the center of these paintings seem to be engaged in a quiet dialogue with the mountains and light in the background. By adding a contemporary perspective while paying homage to traditional techniques, Lin has opened up a new domain of artistic expression for ink. The theme of symbiosis between humans and nature and the instinctive human need for companionship also permeate these works.

◆ *Drawing*

A series of *baimiao* line drawings that Lin has continued to make one of every day since 2016. While ink is a “time-consuming process,” these line drawings entail a certain “improvisational quality, executed with a single stroke.” The simple, lightweight lines of these drawings offer a humorous depiction of imaginary figures such as

Japanese *yokai* monsters and hermits as if they really existed, evoking the sensation of stealing a glimpse into Lin's own imaginary world. Making these drawings is both a habitual endeavor for the artist, as well as a daily voyage of the mind.

◆ *Water Margin*

This series is based on motifs drawn from the classical Chinese literary work *The Water Margin*, reproduced with Lin's expert technique and playful spirit. Familiar heroes take on a fresh appearance, thanks to traditional brush-and-ink depictions and contemporary, caricatural compositions. By injecting a contemporary sense of artistic expression into classical subjects, Lin's unique creative style and cultural interpretations promise to leave the viewer with fresh surprises and discoveries.

Making the most of the distinctive characteristics of his materials, such as the absorbency of the *xuan* paper, the pliability of his brushes, and the fluidity of ink, Lin Yusi's work deploys a diverse range of techniques and a rich, fertile imagination to create a "new ink" mode of artistic expression that transcends time and language. Even as it is rooted in tradition, his stance towards dialogue with the new world embodies certain new trends within the constantly shifting context of East Asian art.

Press inquiries

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Opening Hours | (Tue–Sat) 12:00-18:00
Closed | Sun, Mon, Holidays

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Tulpa 5, 2024, ink and color on paper, 96 × 89 cm



Tulpa 12, 2024, ink and color on paper, 34 × 46 cm



Tulpa 8, 2024, ink and color on paper, 63.2 × 48.5 cm