

Yan Pei-Ming

Execution

13.10.2026

24.10.2026

MASSIMODECARLO Pièce Unique is pleased to present *Execution*, an exhibition by Yan Pei-Ming centred on a new painting made for the space. The Franco-Chinese artist has built one of the most recognisable bodies of work in contemporary painting: monumental canvases, almost always held to a single colour, made with wide brushes and the momentum of the whole body. At the heart of the exhibition is a canvas of 200 × 250 cm that returns to Édouard Manet's *The Execution of Emperor Maximilian* and, for the first time, renders it in red, bringing a nineteenth-century scene of political violence into the present.

Yan Pei-Ming has always painted the faces through which history is made and remembered. Mao and Bruce Lee, figures of his Shanghai youth, sit next to popes and today's heads of state. Dictators and victims taken from the news share space with skulls and tigers. Power and death, the public and the intimate, run through the work in equal measure.

The history of painting belongs to the same conversation. Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* became *Les Funérailles de Monna Lisa*, shown at the Louvre in 2009. Courbet's *A Burial at Ornans* became *Un enterrement à Shanghai*, shown at the Musée d'Orsay in 2019. Goya, Manet and Velázquez have all passed through his studio.

Within this dialogue, executions form a cycle of their own. "I like tragic subjects because I find them eternal," Yan Pei-Ming has said. The cycle began in 2008 with *Exécution, après Goya*, painted in red two hundred years after the executions of 3 May 1808 in Madrid. Four years later he revisited Goya in black and white, and in the same year turned to Manet for the first time. In 2017, for *A Short History of Power and Death* at MASSIMODECARLO London, he took on the fragmented version of Manet's canvas held by the National Gallery. The painting at Pièce Unique is the fifth in the cycle.

Yan Pei-Ming's move from Goya to Manet retraces a path Manet himself had taken. When news of Maximilian's death reached Paris in 1867, Manet drew on Goya's *The Third of May 1808* to compose his own firing squad, and worked on the subject for

almost two years, producing four paintings and a lithograph. In 1951, Picasso looked back at both in *Massacre in Korea*. Yan Pei-Ming joins this lineage of painters who have turned to an earlier image to confront the violence of their own time, and to make others look at it too.

Red has long been part of Yan Pei-Ming's vocabulary, the counterpart to blue, black, and white. Here the shade is "rouge sang" – blood red. It saturates the entire surface: soldiers, victims, wall and smoke share a single field, and the blood is no longer confined to the wounds but becomes the substance of the image.

In 1869, Manet's *Execution* was kept from the French public: the censor banned the printing of his lithograph, and Manet was warned unofficially that the canvas would be refused at the Paris Salon. Today none of his painted versions is in a French collection. Yan Pei-Ming's painting gives the subject a new presence in Paris, in a space built around a single work. When he last showed at Pièce Unique, in 2022, it was with a roaring tiger that faced the viewer head-on. Here the position changes: we stand at the side of the firing squad, at the moment of the shot. In a present crowded with violent images, Yan Pei-Ming holds one scene still, and paints it at the scale of a life.

Yan Pei-Ming

Yan Pei-Ming was born in Shanghai in 1960; he lives and works between Dijon, Paris and Shanghai.

From the beginning of his career, Yan Pei-Ming has stood out for his interest in the human figure and portraiture. He gained international recognition for his expressive and monumental portraits of historical figures like Mao Zedong, the Buddha, the Pope, and Bruce Lee, while also exploring personal themes through self-portraits and depictions of his family.

The artist famously uses a long, mop-sized brush to create his iconic images, working rapidly with wet-into-wet oil paint, primarily on a two-toned monochrome colour palette in black and white or red and white.

Yan Pei-Ming's work is prominently featured in both private and public collections, including: National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; Heidi Horten Collection; S.M.A.K. Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst, Ghent; Guangdong Museum of Art, Guangzhou; Shanghai Art Museum, Shanghai; Yuz Museum, Shanghai; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Collection Lambert en Avignon, Avignon; Pinault Collection, Paris; Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris; Fonds Régional d'Art Contemporain de Bourgogne, Dijon; Institut d'Art Contemporain, Villeurbanne; Le Consortium, Dijon; Les Abattoirs / FRAC Midi-Pyrénées, Toulouse; Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris; Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dijon; Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rennes; Musée Paul Valéry, Sète; Collection Deutsche Bank, Frankfurt; Kunsthalle Mannheim, Mannheim; Museum Ludwig, Cologne; Banca Popolare di Bergamo, Bergamo; Collezione Fondazione San Patrignano, Rimini; GAMEC – Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Bergamo; MAXXI – Museo Nazionale delle Arti del XXI Secolo, Roma; The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo; Qatar Museums Authority, Doha; Sonje Museum of Contemporary Art, Kyongju; Wooyang Museum of Contemporary Art, Gyeongju; Centro de Arte Contemporáneo, Málaga; Voorlinden Museum, Wassenaar; Louvre Abu Dhabi Museum, Abu Dhabi; Academy of Arts, Honolulu; Honolulu Museum of Arts, Honolulu; The Hawai'i State Foundation on

Culture and the Arts, Honolulu; TIA Collection, Santa Fe; He Art Museum, Foshan; Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, San Diego; Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha.

Yan Pei-Ming's work was included in The Lyon Biennale (1997, 2000); Venice Biennale, Venice (1995, 2003); the Sevilla Biennale, Sevilla (2006); the Istanbul Biennial, Istanbul (2007); The Bangkok Biennale (2018), among others.

Artwork

Yan Pei-Ming

L'Exécution de l'empereur Maximilien, après Manet, 2026

Oil on canvas

200 × 250 cm / 78 3/4 × 98 1/2 inches