

CULTURE | ARTS

Portrait of an Artist : Ashley Yeo Wants to Elevate Craft Into Art

Words by KAREN TEE | March 13, 2022



COVER (Photo: Ashley Yeo)

Known for her intricate hand-cut paper sculptures, the former LOEWE Craft Prize finalist aims to showcase the artistic value of her laborious craft

*This March, Tatler invited some of Singapore's most dynamic young artists to reveal how they are pushing boundaries in their art practice and create exclusive self-portraits for us. In the third part of our **Portrait of an Artist** series, we get to know Ashley Yeo.*

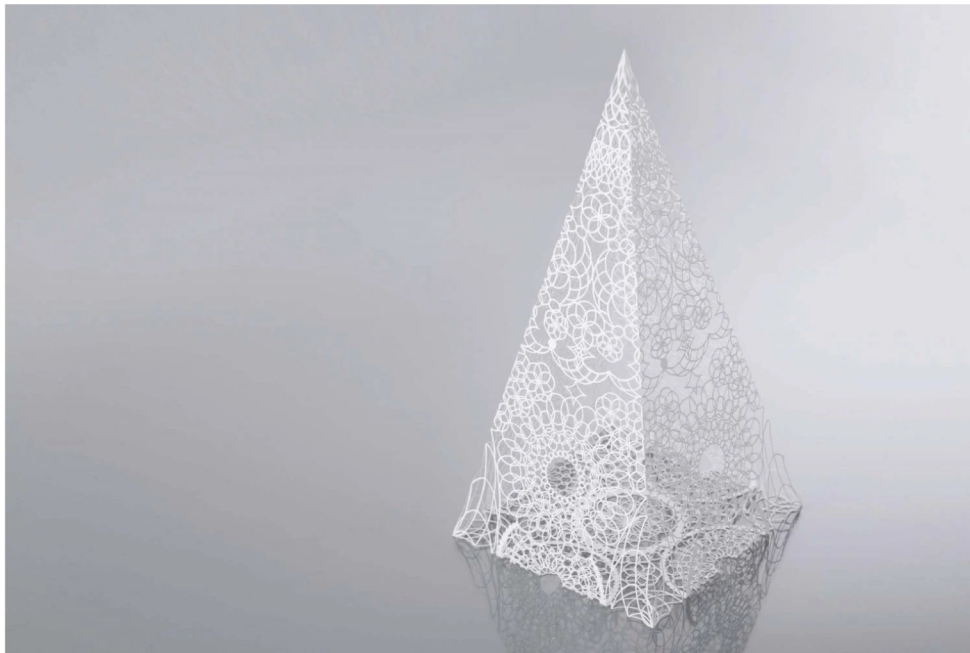
Delicate and ethereal, Ashley Yeo's signature paper art pieces, which are sculptural wonders created by hand-cutting pieces of paper with immense precision, compel the viewer to take the time to soak it all in.

And that is exactly her aim.

Yeo, the first Singaporean artist to be shortlisted for the Loewe Craft Prize in 2018, says: "I

explore concepts of lightness and fragility, and I'm interested in materials that have such qualities. The exploration of slowness is a response to life in modern cities such as Singapore, where in general, we expect a lot of instant gratification."

Her practice, which includes drawings and watercolours, has participated in numerous exhibitions in Singapore, Japan, South Korea, the UK and the US.



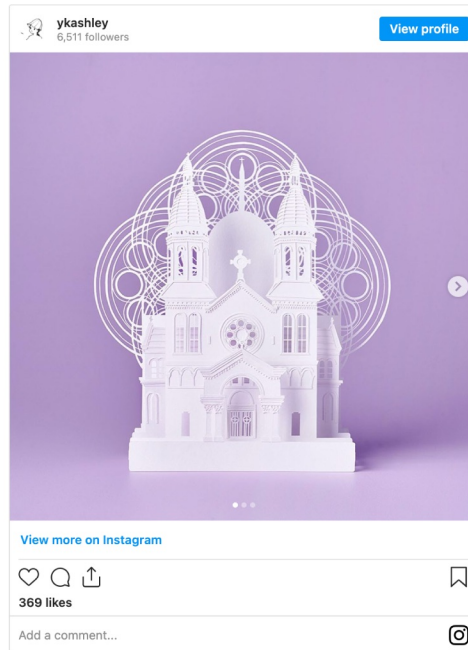
Creating her art is a study in patience and precision, says Yeo, who typically takes about three weeks to design, test and adjust each paper sculpture to her satisfaction. Her 2020 exhibition *Gentle Daylight*, at Singapore's Mizuma Gallery, showcased the range of techniques she has mastered in the craft of turning flat pieces of paper into three-dimensional sculptures.

Despite this laborious process, Yeo is unfazed by the ephemeral quality of paper, especially in Singapore's humid climate. "I've tried to show that not everything has to be long-lasting or permanent, especially in our world, where we're producing a lot of things, such as plastic, that end up endangering the environment. I hope something small and impermanent can say a lot too," says the adjunct lecturer at Lasalle College of the Arts.

That said, the pandemic has inspired Yeo to create art in different mediums, and she has explored unique collaborations with other craftsmen and companies. For instance, she worked with woodworker Louis Kwok on a Tyvek screen that was used in a magazine shoot with singer Stefanie Sun and has created a ceramic installation for Far East Organisation. She is also exploring different processes, such as 3D printing.

"Being flexible and open-minded by being open to working with others has allowed me more opportunities for my own work as well," she reflects.

Yeo is pushing the boundaries for her favourite medium of paper as well. Last year, she created architectural paper cuttings of nine national monuments, such as the Church of St Teresa, for an exhibition of iconic buildings at the National Museum of Singapore.



Through her work, she hopes to show that artists can make it in pragmatic Singapore. “It’s a precious thing, being able to work on what I want to and sustain my livelihood in Singapore. I hope to show that art can be something beyond a simple passion and can be built up through a lot of determination,” she says. “I also wish to shine the light on crafts, not just as a hobby, but as something that can be presented in the contemporary arts scene.”

Take a closer look at Ashley Yeo’s exclusive self-portrait for Tatler



Above (Photo: Darren Gabriel Leow)

Yeo incorporated elements of cutting paper that she usually uses in her own art into her self-portrait, such as a motif of the cutting blade, and delicate patterns revolving around geometry and botanical details. She also took reference from the dahlia’s form to create new patterns for the overall design.