

ART REVIEW

Charles Yuen's paintings are cosmic puzzles to be pondered

'Rhyming the Invisible' is at LaiSun Keane through May 28.

By **Cate McQuaid** Globe Correspondent, Updated May 9, 2023, 3:54 p.m.



Charles Yuen's "Eventualization," 2023, is part of the "Rhyming the Invisible" exhibition at LaiSun Keane. Oil on canvas. CHARLES YUEN

Charles Yuen's paintings in "Rhyming the Invisible" at LaiSun Keane, at once intimate and cosmic, invite viewers into a generative, uneasy world.

The Hawaiian-born artist lives and works in Brooklyn, N.Y., making work rooted in [Surrealism](#) and [Abstract Expressionism](#), art movements built on giving form to mysteries of the psyche. His paintings echo mid-20th-century artworks focused on expressions of self that used techniques such as Surrealism's stream-of-consciousness [Automatism](#).



Charles Yuen, "Touch Memory," 2023. Oil on panel. CHARLES YUEN

Yuen identifies as a Chinese-Japanese-American, and as a Hawaiian in New York. His paintings seem to visit places of not quite belonging and edges of the familiar. They unpack the puzzles they find there.

He paints odd symbols — molecules, outlined figures inside bubbles, ladders, dots — and like Surrealist Joan Miro, Yuen lets the painting lead him. "Made in a process of discovery and revelation, they offer an archeology of their own creation," he writes of his works in his artist statement. His multilayered paintings have a thick, buttery texture; his grounds, often scraped over to create dizzying patterns, read like humming energy fields.



Charles Yuen, "Event Horizon," 2023. Oil on canvas. CHARLES YUEN

At 4 feet high, "Event Horizon" is one of Yuen's larger paintings. The [title](#) refers to the limits of a black hole. Yuen rakes tight concentric circles across an airy background of mottled yellow, mauve, and green; they overlap into a moiré pattern. That hallucinogenic haze hovers below a deep, nearly impenetrable purple. The horizon between them might be the bounds of all we know of reality. His trademark symbols float over the painting: molecular structures, a blue coil, a basket bubbling with dots. All link macrocosm to microcosm, unit to pattern to fractal.

The artist's small paintings are as dense and provocative as his large ones — tiny worlds full of ideograms, like tarot cards. Figures take center stage in "Touch Memory" and "Internal Organs." The former features a person with an internal ladder, juggling disks into the vibrating atmosphere. In the latter, organs within a figure open like

butterfly wings, as circles drop along the side, evoking a lunar calendar. The paintings give form to internal intangibles: feelings, sensations, intuitions, perceptions of time.



Charles Yuen, "Internal Organs," 2023. Oil on panel. CHARLES YUEN

Yuen's paintings are tense and alive with his cosmology and inner life. His visual poetry suggests each living thing is a mystery, but we might enjoy the ways we rhyme.

RHYMING THE INVISIBLE: Charles Yuen

At LaiSun Keane, 460 Harrison Ave., through May 28. 978-495-6697,

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