

Katonah Museum and Pocantico Center Team Up for Joint Exhibition

By Michelle Falkenstein • January 27, 2026



Telling the Full Story Across Two Galleries

“Each presentation can function on its own as a complete statement,” says Michelle Yun Mapplethorpe, director and chief curator at the KMA. “Put together, you can see the breadth, depth and visionary scope of his practice.”

The paintings in Katonah show the influence of Chinese calligraphy and the impact of music on Wei’s practice—many pictures include the names of the musical pieces that inspired them, from Tom Waits to Mozart. At Pocantico, the focus is on Wei’s landscape paintings, large works that reward close inspection. Both exhibitions feature videos: Wei flinging paint onto a white canvas on the floor; performances by his dance company, Shen Wei Dance Arts; scenes from the Opening Ceremonies of the 2008 Beijing Olympics, for which Wei served as lead choreographer; and others.

“Shen Wei is unique,” said Katrina London, curator at Pocantico Center. “Not only is he a multidisciplinary artist, but he’s such a strong example of someone who’s been working this way for 30 years. And to tell the full story, we couldn’t do it in one gallery.”

Artist Shen Wei works in many disciplines, often simultaneously. He's a renowned choreographer and dancer who was a founding member of China's first modern dance company. He's also a visual artist who has had solo exhibitions at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston, the Asia Society Hong Kong Center, the Museum of Art and Design at Miami Dade College, and others.

Through April 19, Wei's artistry can be seen in *STILL/MOVING*, a collaboration between the Pocantico Center of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund in Tarrytown and the Katonah Museum of Art (KMA).



A Collaboration Years in the Making

The seeds for this project were planted in 2008, when Wei's dance company received a grant from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund (RBF). In 2019, while expanded arts programming was being envisioned for the Pocantico Center, the RBF team responded enthusiastically to Wei's exhibition at the Gardner, where he was an artist in residence. Realizing that the complexity of his work demanded a full presentation with an expert partner, the RBF contacted Mapplethorpe, then the director at the Asia Society Museum in New York, with the idea for a collaboration. When Mapplethorpe became director and chief curator at the KMA, the idea came with her.

"It was actually a great way to form a partnership in Westchester," London said.

Wei was born in 1968 in Hunan, China, one of three sons whose parents worked in opera. At nine he left home to study Chinese opera, while also learning traditional Chinese painting and calligraphy. He took up modern dance in 1989 at the Guangzhou Modern Dance Academy.

Wei moved to the U.S. in 1995 after receiving a three-month scholarship to work with Nikolais/Louis Dance Lab. He currently divides his time between New York City and Paris, with dance companies in both cities.



A Total Focus on Artmaking

The eight brown paintings at Pocantico were made in response to Wei's reading of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, part of his exploration of Western culture. Shiny at the edges and rubbed down at their centers, they generate a sense of color on prolonged viewing.

"I started with a time when there were no humans yet, only elements of nature," Wei says of the pictures. "Human feelings were part of the world." Wei chose the paint colors for the gallery walls at both museums and advised on the lighting, using his theatrical experience.

The majority of the paintings at both locations are labeled "collection of the artist." Wei does not have gallery representation and says he avoids social media, public relations and online promotion. "Research and creation, all my energy goes into that," says Wei. "I'm never thinking about selling. I paint because I want to."

For some performances, Wei has his dancers dip their hands and feet in paint, creating marks as they move across the floor. But the results are not paintings, he said. "When I'm making a dance, we're never trying to make a visual element," he says. "They are evidence of movement."

Wei received a MacArthur Fellowship, also known as a "genius grant," in 2007, a \$500,000 prize that was distributed over five years. "It allowed me to focus on my work for five years and not to worry," he explains. In addition to a MacArthur, Wei has received the US Artists Fellow award, a John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship, and other honors.

Mapplethorpe called the shows a wonderful example of how joint ventures can benefit everybody: "To partner with a local organization like the Pocantico Center creates an exciting opportunity for both institutions to reach new audiences."



About Michelle Falkenstein

Michelle Falkenstein writes about culture, food and travel. Publications include The New York Times, Journal News, Albany Times Union, ARTnews Magazine and (201) Magazine

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