

Dear friends, family, and dear Chiao,

Welcome to "I want to see where the river goes" - Chiao's first solo exhibition in the Netherlands. This is truly a very special occasion, and I'm delighted to be here with you today.

Let me start with a confession. I've been with my current partner for many years now - a bald, white man of a certain age. Partners come and go, but this one stayed. And as often happens with partners who stay, he came as a complete package deal. I didn't just get him - I got his sweet but sometimes unpredictable character and his entire professional world. As a father, sculptor, and teacher, I inherited his colleagues, friends, and family.

That's how Chiao entered my life - first as my partner's loyal companion and friend, whom he consistently refers to as "grandpa" with endearing formality. Later, I came to know him as a gifted artist and designer. Several of his works now live in the AkzoNobel Art Collection.

Let me be crystal clear here: this was not a nepotistic decision but purely based on the quality of his work - even though Chiao does keep mentioning his Dutch mother! The art world is small, connections matter, but quality matters more.

Now, it would be easy to use Chiao's biography as a roadmap to his work: childhood in Taiwan, solid education as a designer, moving to Eindhoven for his Master's at the Design Academy, and since then being surrounded by alumni in the close-knit Morph collective. A neat, linear story.

But life itself is never that straightforward. And it's precisely that life - with all its eccentric incoherence, contradictions, and joyful madness - that pulses at the heart of Chiao's work.

In 2016, Chiao graduated with a series called "Dependent Objects" - furniture that literally needs human support, or it falls over. But here's the beautiful thing: WE respond to them too. User and object exist in balance, influencing each other. These weren't just clever design objects; they were physical extensions of human experience, not mere tools but partners in our daily dance.

And "dependence" isn't just a design concept - it's the essence of what philosophers call the human condition. Birth, growth, pain, death, love, happiness, despair, suffering. Chiao's work explores these fundamental experiences, not from an efficiency-obsessed economic perspective, but as an investigation into humans as beautiful bags of contradictions and anxiety. With the eternal question: how do we live?

Look around you now. This exhibition is constructed as a landscape - a series of trees and flower-like objects surrounded by reliefs that resemble mountains, with a river of colored sand winding through them. The French philosopher Gaston Bachelard wrote about "the forest as a state of mind." I see this river the same way - a natural wonder representing our mental and spiritual moods. Water that shows us the dynamic, ever-changing nature of relationships and events. It teaches us to flow around obstacles rather than dam them up, emphasizing journey over destination.

The centerpiece: five sculptures called "Stand by you." These colorful objects look like tree-like structures or ancient standing stones, that have undergone a psychedelic makeover. But unlike those heavy, stable Stone Age monuments, Chiao's sculptures are more like those inflatable punching bags from childhood - push them, and they wobble back and forth before righting themselves.

As a sculptor, Chiao is fascinated by gravity and balance. But "balance" here isn't just physical - it's intellectual, emotional. The title "Stand by you" suggests a promise, a prayer, a manifesto of trust and commitment. But giving this title to sculptures that can barely stand upright themselves? There's something wonderfully bizarre about that, something that makes us smile while touching our hearts.

Look at his other titles: "Behind the clouds the sun is shining (so we can play outside)," "I can't wait for the weekend," "Now that the rain has stopped, there might be a rainbow." These suggest a desire for open-minded, wonder-filled perspective. In our world of constant change and ambivalence, such outlook isn't naive - it's revolutionary. It's necessary.

Chiao's modesty means this landscape isn't a panoramic overview claiming to understand everything. Instead, it's a collection of fragments - notes, memories. He doesn't pretend to grasp life's complexity or know some grand design. He shows us the parts he feels connected to and leaves it to us to piece them together. Just like his "Dependent Objects," we're not mere spectators but active participants, co-creators of meaning.

What helps is the physical nature of these works. Each piece, with its irregular edges, seems torn from something larger. The detailed texture, layering, and flowing paint transforms them from simple images into dynamic, living matter. These fragments aren't static - their flowing appearance embodies the constant merging of life experiences in unstable states, the dynamic process of finding new connections in chaos.

Unlike many artists who impose images onto matter, Chiao seems to reduce images back to matter itself. He doesn't show us a representation of a mental landscape - the work has become the landscape.

And here's what I find most beautiful: Chiao looks at his own objects and speculates about them. They baffle him too. That's the only reason he creates them, and that's what great art should do to all of us - leave us wonderfully confused and eager to understand.

Now, I have some practical news: everything in this exhibition is for sale! Treat yourself and acquire one of these beautiful works. You'll be helping an important artist, supporting Galerie Vivid, and most importantly, enriching your own life.

How do you choose which work to buy? Chiao invites you to wander through this landscape, lose yourself in the possible paths, forget about fixed destinations. Acquire the work that helps you remember this blissful feeling of discovery - even when you're back home dealing with mundane reality.

So explore, get lost, be amazed. Let Chiao's river carry you where it will.

Gallery Vivid thank you for showing this great talented artist and Chiao, congratulations on "I want to see where the river goes." It's been a joy watching your artistic journey, and I'm ready to jump in and float away with this beautiful current you've created.

Now, let's all see where this river takes us.

Hester Alberdingk Thijm, Rotterdam, Galerie VIVID, 19 September 2025