Costituita da 1.140 immagini, *As Simple as Clay* (2013) è una serie di stampe disposte su una griglia che raffigurano oggetti visivamente o metaforicamente associati all'argilla. Strumento di base per modellare oggetti d'arte, l'argilla può essere plasmata e trasformata in qualsiasi cosa. Lo sfondo originale delle fotografie degli oggetti è stato sostituito da un fondale blu per nascondere la loro origine geografica e il contesto culturale. Il criterio apparentemente analitico della presentazione svela subito la propria assurdità rendendo indistinguibili la reale natura e la funzione di questi oggetti. *As Simple as Clay* non stimola soltanto la riflessione sulla nostra interpretazione preconcetta degli oggetti, ma suggerisce anche come i confini culturali possano essere sia sottolineati sia annullati attraverso la manipolazione delle immagini.

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Working along the borderline of photography, collage, video, film and theatre, Shiyuan Liu's practice explores the limit of perception and experience. She constantly challenges the conventional and dualistic observation of life by highlighting the precarious line between the rational and the obscure, between reality and fiction. Liu is interested in how images trigger emotion and how individual interpretations of images in turn alter the seemingly truthful facts. She employs a quasi-scientific system to produce images. The deadpan aesthetics and black humour in her work emerge when the apparently analytical means of production, such as the making of computer-generated imagery, collide with the subjective viewing experience.

Theatricality plays a foundational role in Liu's work. Her approach to theatre is not so much about performance, movement, stage, set, props or lighting, but about spatial experience, temporality, control of the environment and of ambience, and the recontextualisation of the theatre space. In her photographic installation *Too Many Words* (2012) Liu explores the intersection between performance and photography. A series of life-size portraits depicting highly dramatised individuals is arranged on a wall. Cut-out prints of red velvet curtains are woven into the display to further emphasise the literal association with theatrical performance. The staged photographs thus function as fragmented moments extracted from a theatrical setting. By reducing the spatial experience from three-dimensional to two-dimensional, Liu foregrounds the presence of time in which alternative ways of forming storylines become possible.

The Internet search engine provides Liu with a readily available system to manipulate image and meaning. In *A Conversation With Photography* (2013), another large photographic installation work, the artist creates an entire wall collage of pictures of exotic and flamboyant flowers downloaded from the Internet which she found by using unexpected search phrases, such as 'cliché flowers', 'disgusting flowers' and 'flower throw up'. Overlaying prints, Liu is able to produce the optical illusion of three-dimensionality

on an entirely flat surface. Additional sculptural elements – dark tinted glass panels framed by flower-patterned colour frames – are hung at the lower left corner of the flower-collage covered wall to challenge the traditional relationship of photograph and frame. Divorced from its utilitarian function, the frame is now an active component of the presentation with its aesthetic potential while its content almost vanishes.

Consisting of 1,140 images, *As Simple as Clay* (2013) is a series of prints arranged on a grid system and feature objects that are visually or metaphorically associated with the material clay. As a basic modelling tool to create art objects, clay can be shaped and transformed into almost anything. The original background of the images featuring the objects is replaced by a blue backdrop to obscure their geographical origin and cultural context. The efforts of this seemingly analytical process and presentation soon reveal its absurdity as the real nature and purpose of these objects become almost indistinguishable. *As Simple as Clay* not only encourages speculation on the preconceived understanding of objects but also suggests how cultural boundaries can be both present and obliterated through the manipulation of images.