

Cityweekend, Art Review: "The Ears Have Walls" by Gabriel Lester, text/Helen Morgan, March 2014



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Gabriel Lester creates drama from the ordinary in his intriguing show at Leo Xu Projects. His subtle and amusing adjustments to our familiar world invite the viewer to take a step back and look again at their surroundings with a fresh perspective.

With U.S. /Belgium roots and a base somewhere between Amsterdam and Shanghai, Lester started his career in the 1990s with a focus on cinema. His visual experiments in writing, photography and sculpture have been seamlessly arranged at Leo Xu's tucked-away space in the former French Concession.

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At the gallery's entrance, visitors are met with a line of empty suit sleeves protruding from holes in the walls. "MurMure #2" (2014) -- a play on the French word that evokes a soft whisper -- is a series of limbless garments finished with gold ear-shaped cufflinks.

These will be brought to life by performances from local musicians on March 22. The concealed installations "Sibling" (2014) and "The Eyes Have Walls" (2014), a theatrical revolving model of Shanghai that examines perspective, will be displayed sometime this spring.

The second floor is filled with sounds from the "Secret Life of Cities" (2013), a series of films inspired by the idea of being an urban predator, peering out from behind foliage. In the distance is perhaps a busy street or a hazy skyline, each with just a touch of voyeurism that does not reveal anything hidden, merely drawing attention to what is always there.



"Eavesdrop" (2014) welcomes visitors to the "Archive of a Joke"

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section. This sculptural hint of a jaw emerges from the wall to suggest the extension of the body within architecture, and is the first in a collection of objects amusingly altered by the artist. “Seeing Through” (2014) -- a bust with the eyes cut out -- and “Hole in Wall” (2014), both adapt tradition and modify perspective.

Lester’s cinematography presents performers in unusual contexts. In his grainy Super 8 film “Man of Action” (1999–2012), a mime acts out scenarios in the midst of a vast landscape: “An Untitled Incident” (2007) shows a gallery opening where guests ignore the artwork and chatter silently, alluding to art patrons as the true performers of the art world.



“Man Holes”

This understated exhibition is full of unexpected surprises. As engaging as it is funny, Lester’s show inspires the audience to re-explore life with a more imaginative gaze.

“The Ears Have Walls” at [Leo Xu Projects](#), through April 6

By Helen Morgan

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