

Art Asia Pacific, *Love Story*, text /Paul Lester, 2016 June

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ArtAsiaPacific: Liu Chuang Love Story



No stranger to the American art scene, Liu Chuang’s conceptual art has been featured in several outstanding group shows in the United States, including “The Generational: Younger Than Jesus” (2009) at New York’s New Museum, “28 Chinese” (2013) at Miami’s Rubell Family Collection, and “My Generation: Young Chinese Artists,” which recently debuted at the Tampa Museum of Art as well as the Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg.

Although “Love Story” at Salon 94 Freeman’s is Chuang’s first one-person gallery show in the United States, Leo Xu Projects’ solo presentation of the artist’s “Buying Everything On You” and “Love Story” series at 2013 Frieze New York gave American art aficionados their first look at aspects of his current show and left many viewers longing for more. Recognizing the charm of the “Love Story” project—in which Chuang presents recycled romance novels from the 1980s and ‘90s, filled with personal notations that have been passed from one lonely heart to the next—Salon 94 took a leap of faith in mounting a show around this poetic body of work, which may only appeal to the most obsessive art-viewing audience.

Laid out on four low-level tables, 3,000 used paperbacks divulge private and random moments from the lives of migrant factory workers in Dongguan, China, through notes written within the pages and on the covers of pulp-fiction novels. These timeworn scrawls inside the books anticipate the internet, where people publicly share their most intimate hopes and desires today.

The quirky notations, which were written mostly by women, feature drafts for letters, diary entries, naive poems, biographical notes, home addresses and phone numbers, funky doodles, and to-do

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and shopping lists. The beauty of this exhibition versus the Frieze New York display is that, here, we get translations of the original texts blown up in colored script on the gallery walls and indexed with colored rocks on the related books.

Written in orange, for example, is “Ling, I bought a big watermelon, it was not good at all. I will go to ‘that store’ to watch disks after taking shower, will you join me there? Or you can give me a call, but I don’ t know if I will be able to get it?” A message written in green reads: “Another boring day today, I went to mom and dad’ s place for a while after I woke up this morning, and brought my younger sister over. The exams are over, and everyday is a vacation. Don’ t know what to do tomorrow, afraid, I want to see him. But things might have changed over winter break, no idea what he was thinking, even if we met, I don’ t know where we should go, maybe we will not meet ever again.” Elsewhere, written in brown is a proverb: “The way you treat life is the way life treats you.”

Capturing a very specific time in China, Chuang’ s project celebrates the lives of common people dealing with universal issues. Transported to, and translated for, an art gallery in New York, the work reminds us of the simple bond all people share.

Liu Chuang’ s “Love Story” was on view at [Salon 94 Freemans](#) from May 7–June 21, 2014. Paul Laster is the New York desk editor at ArtAsiaPacific.

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