

ArtForum, Critics' Picks: "The Real Thing", Text/ Lara Atallah, February 2016

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"The Real Thing"

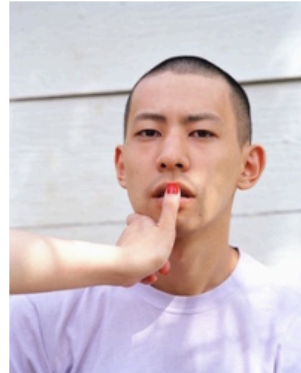
FLOWERS GALLERY
529 W 20th St
January 28, 2016–February 27, 2016

This four-woman photo exhibition sifts through the cavernous world of love in the time of screens and does some subtle paradigm shifting by exploring romantic relationships through the female gaze. Natasha Caruana's "Married Man" series reveals some bleak insights regarding monogamy. Snapshots taken with disposable cameras narrate stories of the artist's dates with married men found through a matchmaking website that caters exclusively to a wedded clientele. Sheepish hand-holding gestures are mixed in with images of half-empty glasses, faceless guys, and empty ring fingers. Her book on the series is filled with details about these rendezvous, which are riddled with secrecy and shallow affection. There's so much desperation to be found within the bonds of marriage.

Pixy Liao invites us to peep into the intimacy of her coupling via self-portraits that upend traditional Chinese ideas in regard to romance. The belief that a woman should be in the care of an older male companion is shattered by Liao's epicurean representations of a relationship where she indisputably has the upper hand. For instance, *Hush, Baby*, 2010 depicts her thumb firmly positioned over her lover's lips—her red lacquered nail like a powerful and sensuous stop sign.

Romance is a complex and—ironically—isolating game. The "real thing," at least here, may just be the loneliness brought on by the endless negotiation of shifting boundaries in a hypermediated world.

—Lara Atallah



Pixy Liao, *Hush, Baby*, 2010, digital C-print, 20 x 16"

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