

BAD LUCK, Pixy Yijun Liao, Text/ Nathan McLaren-Stewart, January 31 2016

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Pixy Yijun Liao

January 31, 2016 · by Nathan McLaren-Stewart · [Leave a comment](#)



from "Experimental Relationship" project

As an artist born and raised in Shanghai, China, but currently residing in Brooklyn, Yijun Liao has always had something to share within her work. She is a recipient of NYFA Fellowship, En Foco's New Works Fellowship and LensCulture Exposure Awards and has done artist residencies at Light Work, Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, Centre for Photography at Woodstock and Camera Club of New York. Her work has been exhibited internationally in China, New York and Taiwan to name a few and we have caught up with her to chat about her distinctive and eye opening work with her series *Experimental Relationship*.



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from "Experimental Relationship" project

You were born and raised in Shanghai but you now reside in Brooklyn, NY. Has the change in culture impacted your work in any way?

There are many unwritten rules in Chinese society. You are always expected by your family and society to do what everyone else is doing, in work and in life. Sometimes you don't even realize them because you are so used to it. Since coming to US, I really felt freedom. I'm no longer expected to do or behave in a certain way by people around me. It's all up to me. For the first time, I can pursue what I'm really interested in. Since then, I start to really get to know myself and that leads me to make the work you see today.

In your description for Experimental Relationship you state "I used to think I could only love someone who is older and more mature than me", has photography had an impact on how you form relationships?

It's photography that helped me start my current relationship. I used it as an excuse to get to know him. I'm not sure if it has impact on our relationships. In the beginning, as a photographer, I would always tell him what to do & not do in front of the camera. That might or might not influenced the way we form relationships. I'm not sure.



It's clear to see that your work challenges conventional ideas of gender dynamics, but what prompted you to work so closely with gender and social stereotypes?

My original idea was not to work on gender or social stereotypes. That all sounded very far

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away from me. I was purely just want to make work about my own life. I look up to those artists who used their life as their art materials, like Sophie Calle or Elina Brotherus. But being a woman myself, I guess it makes my work naturally be about gender and social stereotypes. We are all part of some social stereotypes anyways.

There is also a geopolitical aspect to your work focusing on the relationship between Japan and China. This however appears to be more of an underlying message...

The fact that we are Chinese and Japanese makes our relationship a little more complicated. It's real that sometimes we will talk about different views from Japan and China, and sometimes we just can't agree with each other. These cultural background difference has influenced our relationship and made us who we are now. So even though it might not be very clear about we are Chinese vs Japanese, what I've photographed are inevitably the result of that.

Explain your reasons behind this geopolitical approach and how it mixes with the love between you and your partner.

Besides love, there're also other things inside of a relationship, like doubts, confrontations and compromises. One thing always on my mind is how to make this relationship work. I'm always looking for an equation for a balanced relationship. People are all different, so any two people will have their unique way to get along (or not). It's similar to what countries do to countries... I'm not sure if I have answered this question.



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There's a strong sense of intimacy in your work. How difficult is it to cultivate intimacy and trust between artist and subject?

It takes years. I started this project in the 2nd year of our relationships. In the beginning when I was photographing him, it felt just like photographing a model. I ask him to do one thing, but I'm not sure what is on his mind & he doesn't know what's on my mind. When I started this project, I start to feel that we are together. The more I photograph him, the more he understands me and I know him. I always feel I cannot photograph any other people the way I photograph him. It's very different feeling. Sometimes I feel we are almost one person.

You have previously mentioned that you have been inspired by a conversation you had about your relationship with your boyfriend by a male friend. Do you tend to find inspiration in simple things, i.e. a conversation?

Always. The ideas come from real life. Sometimes it's a gesture, a word, a look. It's the things that I feel in life but cannot express, until some very simple thing hits me. Life is my art material.



from "Experimental Relationship" project

We also know you're in a band called PIMO. Give us some more information!

My partner & I have a band together called PIMO. It's a combination of our names, Pixy &

Moro. Moro is a musician. I do most of the singings and sometimes lyrics and melody in the band, and he takes care of everything else. It's like a trade, he collaborates in my photos and I collaborate in his music. We've made two albums and some really stupid music videos so far. We have a website: www.pimoband.com.

Have a look at more of Pixy Yijun Liao's work on her site [here](#).

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