

Beyond Chinatown, *The Real and the Unreal: Pixy Liao's "Experimental Relationship"*, Text/ Hansi Liao, February 13 2016

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The Real and the Unreal: Pixy Liao's "Experimental Relationship"

HANSI LIAO on Saturday, February 13th, 2016 at ---

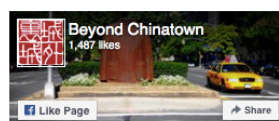


A large photographic print on faux suede depicting photographer Pixy Yijun Liao and her boyfriend Moro is the highlight of a wall in Flower Gallery's Chelsea location. Standing in a room full of sunlight, the expressionless couple wears only underwear and is connected to each other by several leads and electrodes. Pictures from this series, *Experimental Relationship*, scattered on the adjacent wall, pique viewer's curiosity about the peculiarities of their romantic relationship. As one of the four female photographers in the group show *The Real Thing*, which showcases their experimentations with gender roles, sexuality, and constructed identity through the frame, Pixy uses her staged photography to blur the real and the unreal elements of her romance with her partner, who is five years younger than her – an unusual relationship if judged by traditional Chinese values.



Untitled, 2015. Installation view of *The Real Thing* at Flowers Gallery

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EVENTS

Thursday, September 22

Taiwan Excellence NY Product Showcase 201

16:00 Cultural Revolution, Propaganda

18:00 Access Denied: Foreign Journalists

Friday, September 23

Taiwan Excellence NY Product Showcase 201

Saturday, September 24

Taiwan Excellence NY Product Showcase 201

11:00 Celebrate Taiwan!

Sunday, September 25

Taiwan Excellence NY Product Showcase 201

12:00 The Comeback of Confucius in M

Tuesday, September 27

16:10 Religion in Taiwan Society



CURRENT EXHIBITIONS

Wednesday, September 21

Masterpieces of Chinese Painting from the Me

Colors of the Universe: Chinese Hardstone C

From the Imperial Theater: Chinese Opera Co

Cinnabar: The Chinese Art of Carved Lacquer

Folk My Life

Han Bing: Urban Amber

Zhai Liang: Living Room

Hai-Hsin Huang: A Museum Show

SHEN JINGDONG + JON TSOI: No Head No

Tango Pop Up Exhibition

Erote

Hung Liu: American Exodus

Miao Xiaochun: Metamorphosis

Xu Zhen

No Limits: Zan Wuu-Ki



<http://www.beyondchinatown.com/2016/02/13/the-real-and-the-unreal-pixy-liaos-experimental-relationship/>

LEO XU PROJECTS

Born and raised in Shanghai, China, Pixy was told that an ideal romantic partner would be someone who is older and more mature than she, someone who can protect her and be her mentor. When Pixy met Moro eleven years ago in Tennessee, she did not know he was from Japan or his age, but he changed her expectations. Moro was happy to pose for Pixy's photography assignment for school before they started dating. In her sometimes unconventionally posed photos, Moro is usually undressed, looking away from the lens. His sensitive and vulnerable position, designed and staged by Pixy, reflects her sense of humor while breaking the usual power dynamics in a heterosexual relationship.

After seeing the exhibition, we interviewed Pixy in a Chinatown cafe to learn more about her art and her life.



Home-made Sushi, 2011

Beyond Chinatown (BC): People are familiar with photos from your *Experimental Relationship* series, but we are curious about the "behind the scenes". In your early series *Memphis, Tennessee*, we see some familiar ideas that appear in your later works. Could you please tell us about how the *Experimental Relationship* series started – Did the idea emerge before you met your boyfriend Moro?

Pixy Liao (PL): There was some overlapping time between *Memphis, Tennessee* and *Experimental Relationship*. In the beginning, I was just making photographs. I didn't have a very clear idea of which photos were for which projects. The photos came first, and the projects came later. The *Experimental Relationship* project started about one year after I began dating my boyfriend. In the beginning, I only asked him to pose in my various photo class assignments in a way that used him as a "prop" in my photos. Sometimes I would ask him to play dead in the bathtub or climb into a suitcase naked. When I showed these photos on class, my teachers' and classmates' first question would be "How can you treat Moro like that?" It was quite surprising to me, because I thought it was totally normal. I asked him to pose in my photos, and he did it. It was natural for us. From people's various responses to our relationship, I realized that our relationship is considered out of the norm by many people. That inspired me to make this project.



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LEO XU PROJECTS



Relationships work best when each partner knows their proper place, 2008

BC: This project continues with your relationship, however you indicated in your artist statement that it is never meant to be a documentation. Could you please explain this further? How would you define the boundary between your art and you real life?

PL: In this project, sometimes, I'm trying to describe our relationship; sometimes, it's the things that I would love to do but cannot really do it in real life. This project is based on our real relationship and grows with it. The photos are influenced by our current relationship status; it has brighter and darker times.



Hush, Baby, 2010.

BC: It is interesting to learn that you describe this Chinese-Japanese relationship as a "love-hate" one. Given the perceptions of the relationship between the two countries, can you talk about your experience?

PL: Before I met Moro, I had no particular feelings for Japan, no dislikes but I wouldn't say I liked it. I never watched any Japanese TV shows and almost never got to know about Japanese culture since I was really into American cultures. Also, I grew up being told about some stereotypes of Japanese people being arrogant and mean — those were the impressions I had. When I learned that Moro is Japanese, I was a bit surprised but after getting to know him better, I think he is quite okay. I would say that now our relationship is still affected by the relationships between the two countries. At first, both of us were a bit reluctant to tell our parents about the relationship because of the stereotypes they believe. We grew up in two different cultures. These two cultures are similar but at the same time are vastly different on many views. I find it sometimes very difficult for us to agree on certain things, especially when we talk about the relationship between China and Japan. We can't really dig too far into issues like this or we would start arguing. But we have visited each other's parents and we had a good time!



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LEO XU PROJECTS

How to build a relationship with layered meanings, 2009

BC: Your works from this series are featured in shows, both physical and online, and have an international audience. Since you grew up in a culture that emphasizes women's obedience to men in relationships, we are curious about people's reactions to *Experimental Relationship*. What are the differences across cultures?

PL: I found different cultures have different reactions to my work. In general, I find US/western audiences like my work because they think it's fresh to see some different ideas about gender identities. But for Asian audiences, like from Taiwan or Thailand, they feel more resonance with my work, because we come from similar cultural backgrounds. I also have some fans from very male-dominated countries like Iran. And the most interesting thing is most of those fans are male. So far, I have had very limited publication of this work in China. It's both because of Chinese censorship and also because I'm very concerned about which audience I would like to show this project to. I think the general public in China is still not ready to see work like this.



Start Your Day with a Good Breakfast Together, 2009

BC: Valentine's Day is around the corner. If you had something to say to Lovers and the Loveless, what it would be?

PL: Be open-minded. Don't limit yourself because you think you have certain types or rules. Follow your heart and you might surprise yourself.



Try to Live like a Pair of Siamese Twins, 2009

Experimental Relationship is on view as part of *The Real Thing* at Flowers Gallery until February 27

LEO XU PROJECTS

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Lead image: Creating a World Just for Us, 2013. Photos courtesy of the artist.

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