

Cool Hunting, *The Real Thing* at NYC's Flowers Gallery, Text/ Nara Shin, January 25 2016

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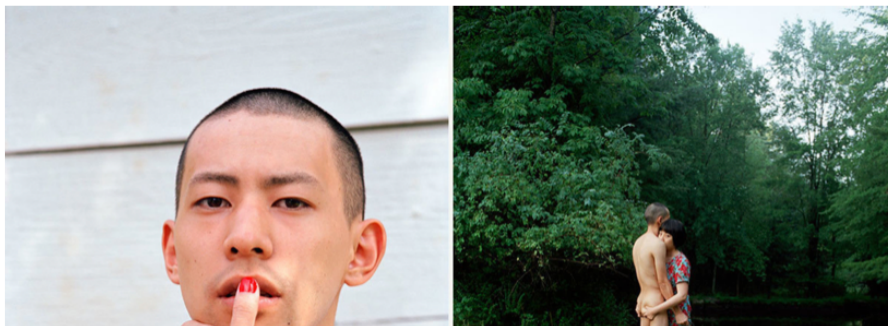


The Real Thing at NYC's Flowers Gallery

A group exhibition of four photographers gets the head spinning on gender constructs, relationships and more

by Nara Shin
on 25 January 2016

This Thursday, the Chelsea, NYC location of Flowers Gallery opens "The Real Thing," a group exhibition featuring photography from four different artists questioning social constructs of gender, identity, femininity and more. Most of the four have aimed the lens at themselves. Recent graduate Juno Calypso (who was named a winner of the 2016 British Journal of Photography's International Photography Awards) stars in a series of self-portraits as an imagined character named Joyce. Set in gaudy hotel rooms, Calypso's photos and videos probe the fatiguing performance of femininity through props (from wigs to vintage massage masks), mirrors and an inscrutable expression.



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Another photographer, Pixy Yijun Liao, explores her relationship with a man who is five years younger. In her ongoing series "Experimental Relationship," first started in 2007, Liao conceives fictional situations that challenged "the norm of heterosexual relationships." From eating fruit off her naked boyfriend's body to each wearing the same dress, Liao has created simple scenes that question why we accept certain things as normal, and others not.



"The idea [for 'The Real Thing'] grew out of the observation that we at Flowers could do more to promote female photographers as our current roster of photographers is a bit male dominant," show curator and coordinator Brent Beamon tells CH. "Over the last few years, we have increased the number of photography-based exhibitions here in New York and thought that this show would be a great platform to highlight four photographers who share a similar point of view. Each artist's works are such personal and engaging contemplations of female identity and female relationships."

The example above shows "Married Man" by Natasha Caruana, who went on 80 "dates" with men she met online—specifically through sites proposing extramarital affairs. She captured these meetings, with no faces shown, through a disposable camera; from these documented visual fragments, the viewer comes up with their own theories about the motivations of the married men, and what they long for—beyond sex.



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Continues Beamon, "The title 'The Real Thing' stems from a statement by Melanie Willhide, where her works were described as 'absurd proxies for the real thing.' Each artist in this exhibition plays with notions of constructed identities in the world around us. Romantic relationships, gender roles, and notions of femininity are performed, enacted, and re-imagined—thus producing images and artifacts that are critical simulacrum of the 'real thing.' It is a simple statement that ties the conceptual aspects of each artist's work together."



"The Real Thing" opens 28 January 2016 at Flowers Gallery (529 West 20th St) and will run through 27 February 2016.

Images courtesy of the artists and Flowers, London/New York