

Peril Magazine, *Location, the Female Gaze and the Warmth of the Internet*, Text/ Kathleen Linn, 12 August 2016



LOCATION, THE FEMALE GAZE AND THE WARMTH OF THE INTERNET

BY: KATHLEEN LINN, FILED UNDER: VISUAL ARTS | PUBLISHED: AUGUST 12, 2016

[Some words are just between us](#) presents a series of [Pixy Liao's](#) staged photographs, which focus on Pixy and her boyfriend Moro's relationship while exploring power dynamics and identity in a very personal and intimate manner.

Some of the photos feature Moro, on his own, positioned according to Liao, "as a prop", whereas others depict the couple together. Liao's photographs also present the male body in a different light – subjecting it to the female gaze. Here Kathleen Linn chats about these ideas and more with Chinese-born, New York-based artist [Pixy Liao](#) and Melbourne-based Curator [Sophia Cai](#).

[Some words are just between us](#) is at firstdraft 13-17 Riley St, Woolloomooloo until 28 August.

Kathleen Linn (KL): I am interested in how we are simultaneously globalised and yet very personal / localised at the same time. It is interesting that the work of a Chinese-born, New York-based artist can fit so easily into an Australian context. Could you say a little about how it feels to be working within this present condition and how you two came to be working on this exhibition together?

Sophia Cai (SC): I have been talking with Pixy for about a year and a half. I wanted to curate an exhibition of young Chinese artists who grew up after the 1970s, after the Cultural Revolution, or who grew up overseas. I am interested in looking at personal relationships and intimacy and what it means to relate to people today. We started talking about some other projects, with some other artists and this happened quite organically. Her work fits well within this context – it is immediately relatable, as it is so personal, but there are a lot of themes you can unpack.

Pixy Liao (PL): I felt my work was too personal, a strange couple together. Who would understand or be interested in these two people? Since I have been making these works I have had conversations with people about their relationships. The universality of the work is that it is about relationships. People are moving more frequently, there are immigrants everywhere. Moro and I are both immigrants in the United States, but our minds are Americanised.

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and I are both immigrants in the United States, but our minds are Americanised as we both studied there.

Sophia Cai: Contemporary art can break down barriers between people by showing common themes – that we are all people with the same worries and fears. Themes about family, gender, personal relationships are very universal.



Pixy Liao, It's never been easy to carry you, 2013, digital print, 44cm x 58cm

SC: The Internet has played a huge part in how we came together and talked. Until being in Sydney this week we had never met – we talked by email and once on Skype! We are living in an age where it is very easy to reach out to people.

PL: I think the Internet is good to share knowledge. WeChat is a Chinese version of Facebook – I have connected with the other Chinese artists I have met here on WeChat. I was in an exhibition in the US called *WeChat* which was about young Chinese artists living overseas, who were born after the Cultural Revolution and who use WeChat.

SC: The Internet and social media are really important in how we met and work together.

PL: The Internet is helping people to move more smoothly in the world and in different countries. Without the Internet, it would be so cold.

KL: You both have Chinese heritage, do you feel this influences your work? And if so in what way?

PL: Yeah, I pretty much grew up as a Chinese woman. I finished my undergrad in China and worked a bit before going to the United States for grad school. In China my expectations were of graduating and getting a normal job like all my classmates. I thought of myself as a very normal Chinese person and then I went to the US and it changed my life. It happened naturally, finding myself again, in a new way.

Pixy Liao: My work is really about the experience of growing up as a normal Chinese woman in China and how I felt at that time. When I think back many things that I thought were normal or I had doubts with, I now think of in another way – like in a more artistic way and my work is a reflection of that.

SC: My experience is quite opposite, I grew up in Australia and studied art history. It was only when I started looking at Chinese contemporary art history that I reengaged with that cultural heritage and tradition. For me, I was

interested in Chinese art not just because of my heritage, but because currently there is a very big movement towards globalisation and a moving away from the canonical, Western art history tradition and that is something that interests me. My studies have informed my work, especially this exhibition.

PL: Somehow I feel like I am more relevant in Australia than in the US. Asian-Americans, born in the US... It's kind of hard to have the same discussions with them because they really think of themselves as American and don't really understand anything that has happened in China – but here I kind of feel like people have more of an understanding, even non-Asian people.



Disc: Lisa Soft heel shoes 2012 3D printed soft heels crocheted shoes metal 12cm x 12cm x 12cm

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KL: Pixy, your intimate photographs call into question traditional roles around who is sexualised for the camera and the viewer's pleasure. Your work Soft heeled shoes (2013) replaces the high heel of a pair of shoes with a soft, 3D printed penis-shaped heel and in an accompanying video work you walk around a park in these shoes. Can you talk a little about the Asian female perspective and how it relates to your work?

PL: I remember in middle school and junior high school, I become more and more unhappy with my female identity. I really wished I was not a woman and I could be a boy – people would always say to me that 'if you are a boy you can go out and explore but if you are a girl you should stay at home.' I was rejecting my female identity at that time, I was a tomboy. Then in the 90s Western music began to come into China and I listened to this music, I was really rebelling. I liked a lot of those female singers and artists, and I found my voice.

Pixy Liao: I am just really trying to create a world that I can fit in, rather than this world I grew up in where I felt I was not a good fit.

SC: I arrived at this quite naturally – as a female art curator to be working with a number of female artists.



Pixy Liao, *We are connected*, 2015, digital print, 58 cm x 44 cm, edition of 3

KL: The Female Gaze is something you are both interested in, perhaps in slightly different ways. What are some of the attributes you see as being part of the female gaze – is it similar to the male gaze or different?

SC: There are two ways of looking at it – either as the equivalent of the male gaze where the male body is sexualised or where the female body is looked at from a female perspective. There have been a number of exhibitions that have explored this topic. But what I am interested in is a broader idea, in how women look at the world. It's a perspective that doesn't necessarily have to do with the body or representation.

I asked Pixy about her work, if it sexualises the male body? There are a lot of phallic symbols – her sculpture and the wallpaper for example. This could be interpreted as female sexuality, female desire. There is something interesting in how these things become automatically sexualised, we are still talking about gender in these terms...

PL: When we make artworks about body parts, gender, people automatically associate it with sexuality – of course sexuality is a part of it. I read about an artist who was making drawings about different sexual positions and people assumed that he was really sex addicted, but he wasn't at all. He explained that this is why he could use it so freely – to make jokes etc.... I don't think I sexualise the male body, I like the male body. Mostly because I consider it less sexual than the female body – their chest is flat, they don't have boobs. It is very minimal – it is calm, cold. It doesn't make people react too much.

SC: Photography and its relationship to the gaze is interesting. There are all these metaphors of the camera as a phallic thing, it is looking at a subject in a certain way. With Pixy's work it is interesting because she sets up the shot, but Moro has the remote and he takes the picture. So, she is playing with some of those ideas.

KL: Thank you so much for your time Pixy and Sophia.

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Kathleen Linn is a Sydney-based writer and curator. She is currently interested in how art, our lives, theory and technology intersect and is exploring how we can conceptualise this in text-based forms. [View all posts by Kathleen Linn](#)