

Photo District News, *PDN Photo of the day: Constructing and Deconstructing Romance*, Text/
Rebecca Robertson, February 1 2016



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February 1, 2016

Constructing and Deconstructing Romance

"Some words are just between you and me," 2010. © Pixy Liao/Courtesy of Flowers Gallery

The camera is a subversive tool in "[The Real Thing](#)," a show of four women working with photography on view at [Flowers gallery](#) in New York until February 27. Playing with ideas of gender, femininity and intimacy, Pixy Liao, Juno Calypso, Natasha Caruana and Melanie Willhide use the camera to explore power dynamics in relationships, to blur the lines between horror and beauty and to question the role of photography in the idea of romance.

[Juno Calypso](#) features old-fashioned beauty rituals in her pink-soaked self portraits, many of which were shot in a Pennsylvania honeymoon hotel. Covered from head to toe in the deathly green of a seaweed wrap, or obscured a massage mask that recalls [Jason's](#) hockey mask, Calypso's images suggest a secret world of suffering hidden in the routines of beauty. Says Calypso in an [interview](#), "I'm drawn to the aesthetic of it all – the strange devices, products and tools. The way it all feels like a bad sci-fi film. I'm also interested in the way we always perform these rituals alone, or alone with a stranger in a candle lit treatment room."

For her series "Experimental Relationship," [Pixy Liao](#) photographs herself and her partner Moro in strange, sometimes funny staged scenes that undermine traditional power dynamics between men and women. In them, Liao is often clothed and Moro is not—she eats fruit balanced on his nude body at the kitchen table, or whispers in his ear. She is protective and powerful while he is vulnerable and seductive. "I see the world as an unequal place. There are always some people who have more rights than others, whether they are male or female," says Liao in a recent [interview](#). "[My boyfriend] is sometimes very sensitive and fragile. It makes me imagine I'm a knight dating a princess, and I'm the little pea that makes him uncomfortable."

In [Melanie Willhide's](#) series "Sleeping Beauties (The Box Under the Bed)," pin-up girls and boys appear faintly on prints covered with scratches, glue marks and handwritten notes, as if showing through to the backs of old photos. But the snapshots and their backs are

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as if showing through to the backs of old photos. But the snapshots and their backs are completely fabricated by Willhide, tokens of love affairs that never happened. "For me photography is a type of artificial intimacy," Willhide says in an [interview](#). "This work is all about artifice...thousand-layer phyllo dough of artifice: artificial pictures, artificial subjects, artificial situations, and artificial text. All of this points to the illusion."

For her series "Married Man," [Natasha Caruana](#) went on 80 dates with men she met through a matchmaking site for married people. Shot with a disposable camera, the blurry, askew pictures depict the mise en scène of 80 dullish dates - tables covered in pint glasses and coffee cups, just emptied chairs. Many include the hands of the man across from her, but never his face. The offhand look of the images enforces their authenticity as records of secret encounters, and the banality of infidelity. "I was always aware I didn't really want their faces, I wanted gestures," says Natasha Caruana in an [interview](#). "An image of where the pint glass is finished and the man's hands are pushed together in anticipation. *What happens now? Do we get another drink? Do we go somewhere else?* Photography has this amazing power of being able to capture that."

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