

EXHIBITION

REVIEWS

CHINA

Shanghai

Pixy Liao
at Leo Xu Projects

What does it mean to be young, in love, and Asian in America? Pixy Liao's homecoming exhibition *Venus As A Boy* offers some witty, gender-jostling in her recent photographs that are part love story, part interpersonal playground. In her ongoing project *Experimental Relationship*, Liao, who is Shanghai-born but currently Brooklyn-based, together with her Japanese male partner Moro, who is both model and muse, engage in a series of portraits in which the role of power between the sexes is often humorously explored and deconstructed.

Her best photographs are large scale, as in *Hang in There* (2015) in which Liao's lover, standing, naked from the waist down, is dangled from laundry-room coat hanger rigged beneath his T-shirt. In *Kiss Exam* (2015), also large format, the couple smooch, in front of a magnifying glass, in their underwear. The focus is on the couples' lips, enhanced, and enlarged by the lens, appearing disfigured and somewhat grotesque.

Liao's video *Walking with My Man*, installed on the gallery's third floor, documents a performance of the artist wandering the streets of New York dressed in a girls' high-school sports uniform and carrying a life-sized rag doll of a male figure on her back. Mimicking a music video—Liao and Moro, who formed a musical duo known as PIMO, created the soundtrack. The video straddles stereotypes about fetishism and campy Japanese television shows popular with Chinese audiences in the 1980s. To complete the installation the actual man-sized doll is displayed on the back of a female mannequin, and the girls' sport uniform is folded neatly and placed inside a vitrine, suggesting high-end cou-



Above:
Pixy Liao,
Kiss Exam, 2015,
digital C-print,
37.5 x 50 cm/ 75 x 100 cm.
Left:
Pixy Liao,
Hang in there, 2015,
digital C-print,
50 x 37.5 cm/ 100 x 75 cm.
Images:
Courtesy of the Artist and
Leo Xu Projects.

ture display and packaging.

Liao's video and accompanying props, though cleverly installed, are not Liao's strongest work. She is best behind the viewfinder or in front of the lens. Perhaps the most compelling photograph in this show is *Moro by the Pond*, which was shot during Liao's residency at the Center for Photography in Woodstock, New York. Alone, naked, and perched on a rock, with a lush forest as backdrop, a lithe Moro gazes toward the viewer, pensive and melancholic—a young Narcissus beside his pool. The image excludes a classicism and poise. It is endearing and powerfully romantic in all the right ways.

Liao challenges Chinese social conventions about rela-

tionships, particularly of her generation, and champions the edgy alternative dynamics between men and women in a heterosexual relationship. She wants her work to be both seriously funny, as we say, and taken seriously or seen as radical or even defiant. Joke telling as Freud thought can come as verbal packages to express our unconscious thoughts about sex, lust, desire, control, among myriad acts of aggression in our daily lives. Some of what Liao is addressing is no laughing matter. She might, however, want to try a little more tenderness.

Arthur Solway

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HONG KONG

First Smash 3 at
Art Experience Gallery

Of the eight young artists whose works make up the third edition of this open-call exhibition, two are painter, one is a printmaker, and one works with print and calligraphy, while the other four work with sculpture and installation. They are of a new generation of Hong Kong artists striving to find their place in the city's fluid art world and in society at large. With only two exceptions—the Korean painter Hye Kyoung Kwon (b.1984) and Leung Wan In (b.1988)—the others were born at the beginning of the 1990s.

In a political and social sense these artists' voices are unique: they have grown up almost completely beyond real first-hand experience of British colonialism, yet are aware of its influence and how Hong Kong has transitioned from it. With this in mind one sees something of the struggle to adapt to a new world. The adjustment is one filled with both the angst of youth and the desire to examine the experience of place and time in a deeply honest way. Their materials are simple and of the everyday.

I have always loved the art of printmaking. Like sculpture and craft, printmaking is an extraordinarily personal and tactile art form. When looking at a print one always has a sense of process, a feeling of being present with the artist. One feels this with the work of Pang Chek Ying (b.1991) whose collagraphs are beautifully realized. The various materials that she uses in their making—including cardboard, string, and sand paper—lend her collective work a feeling of depth and rough textures that is unique. For example, looking at her piece entitled *Passage #06* (2014) from a distance one get the feeling of solid rock formations bathed in a beautiful natural light. The others in her series are equally strong and textured.