

ARTFORUM

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I N T E R N A T I O N A L





VENUS LAU

VENUS LAU IS A CURATOR AND WRITER BASED IN SHANGHAI. SHE IS CURRENTLY THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF K11 ART FOUNDATION, AND HAS SERVED AS ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF OCT CONTEMPORARY ART TERMINAL IN SHENZHEN. SHE IS THE EDITOR OF *CAO FEI: SPLENDID RIVER* AND *ZHANG PEILI: CERTAIN PLEASURES*, AMONG OTHER PUBLICATIONS. (SEE CONTRIBUTORS.)



1

"GHOSTS AND SPECTRES—SHADOWS OF HISTORY" (NTU CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY ART SINGAPORE; CURATED BY UTE META BAUER AND KHIM ONG) Apparitions are a common metaphorical medium for an unspoken and unmourned past, and the works in this show, which addressed various traumatic Asian histories of the postwar period, featured ghosts in myriad guises. The video installation *The Nameless*, 2015, by Singapore-based artist Ho Tzu Nyen, comprises clips of the Hong Kong actor Tony Leung, edited together so that he appears to inhabit the persona of Lai Teck—one of fifty aliases used by the phantomlike secretary general of the Malayan Communist Party from 1939 to 1947. Meanwhile, the work's murmuring Vietnamese and Mandarin narration brings to mind the Cantonese phrase for slurring one's words: *gwāi sikh nāih*, literally "ghost eating dirt." The cultural geology of ghosts in this show added welcome nuance to the language of horror in Asia, where the massive successes of *Ringu* (The Ring, 1998) and *Ju-on* (The Grudge, 2002) propagated a homogeneous iconography of the supernatural—long hair and white gowns, devoid of cultural specificity.



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"HERE'S LOOKING AT YOU! A GENERATION OF CHINESE PHOTOGRAPHIC PORTRAITS BEFORE THE SELFIE" (SHANGHAI CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY; CURATED BY KAREN SMITH) In her essay "In Plato's Cave," Susan Sontag likens the camera to a gun. Now, lenses are more like mirrors, reflecting the subject into labyrinthine social platforms. (In China, MeituPic, a photo-editing app popular for its filters, attracts millions of active users per month.) This exhibition traced the transformation of self-portraiture in China, tracking, among other things, shifting conventions of framing and the effects of changing technology. In one set of images, spanning the 1930s to the '80s, the dimensions were particularly narrow, like bookmarks; the subjects pressed their arms against their torsos, ensuring their entire bodies would be seen in the frame.



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LIANG SHAOJI (SHANGHART GALLERY, SHANGHAI) Rather than work near the metropolitan centers of Beijing or Shanghai, Liang lives his hermit life on Tiantai Mountain, surrounded by silkworms. The exhibition's title, "Liang Shaoji: Sha Sha Sha," evoked the sounds of his strand-producing larvae's movements, suggesting an effort—via the foregrounding of pure noise—to dismantle stereotypical associations with these creatures. At ShangHART, Liang's raw-silk-wrapped "soft sculptures" punctuated the space—mesmerizing studies of translucency and its degrees.



5

1. Ho Tzu Nyen, *The Nameless*, 2015, two-channel HD video, color, sound, 21 minutes 51 seconds. From "Ghosts and Spectres—Shadows of History." 2. Thomas Sauvin, *Beijing Silvermine—E-0707-20, 1985–2005*, ink-jet print, 26% × 39%. From "Here's Looking at You! A Generation of Chinese Photographic Portraits Before the Selfie." 3. Liang Shaoji, *In Silence*, 2015–16, twelve plastic barrels, silk, cocoon, dimensions variable. 4. Zheng Guogu, *6 Two Dimensional Ends = Key of Life*, 2016, oil on canvas, 53 × 75%".

4

ZHENG GUOGU (VITAMIN CREATIVE SPACE, GUANGZHOU) "The Winding Path to True-ness," an extension of Zheng's ongoing Yangjiang, China-sited project *Liao Garden*, 2005–, signaled a shift in the artist's areas of interest: from an online game involving virtual civilizations to the invisible energies in the overheated wellness economy. Images derived from Thangka paintings—sourced from the internet—hung alongside canvases featuring hexagonal shapes taken from visualizations of chakras.



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HIGHER BROTHERS FEAT. KEITH APE'S 2017 VIDEO WECHAT, DIRECTED BY SEAN MIYASHIRO

Released by 88rising, the music label founded by Miyashiro that focuses on Asian rappers, this video tosses together elements from the user interface of WeChat, an app that has standardized the collective experience of social networking in China, a country where Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube are blocked. Banner notifications, emoji stickers, and visual motifs familiar from video calls and photo transfers form the visual backdrop for trap music by the Chengdu-based Higher Brothers, who surf smoothly in the territory of Chinese mumblecore.



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"MUSE FOR A MIMETICIST: WANG WEI AND KO SIN TUNG" (EDOUARD MALINGUE GALLERY, SHANGHAI)

Formal echoes filled this exhibition, from Wang Wei's bathroom-tile mosaic to Ko Sin Tung's video comparing the aspect ratios of various video formats. Together, the works on view explored the ways in which the parallel processes of urbanization and technological obsolescence shape our perceptual faculties.

9

ALICE WANG (CAPSULE SHANGHAI) With this show, the Chinese-born, LA-based artist kept asking a simple question: What is a sculpture? The spare and elegant works she presented—incorporating materials such as mist, moss, and the plant *mimosa pudica*—provided only the barest answer.

10

YU YOUHAN (POWER STATION OF ART, SHANGHAI; CURATED BY GONG YAN) This retrospective tracked the seventy-three-year-old painter's fifty years of artistic practice. Although the presence of his colorful Mao paintings may have perpetuated the epistemological short circuit that has equated the artist's works with "political Pop," the dazzling mix of styles on display here—from Picabian collage to experimental Chinese ink drawings—kept the reductionist view at bay. Ultimately, the show was a powerful survey of competing modernisms. □



5. View of works by Firenze Lai, 2017, Central Pavilion, Venice. From the 57th Venice Biennale. From left: *Stargazing*, 2013; *Autism*, 2013; *Happily Ever After*, 2013. Photo: Chandra Glick. 6. Nadim Abbas, *Human Rhinovirus 14*, 2016, centrifugal blowers, beach balls, projectors, sandbags, galvanized steel. Installation view, Antenna Space, Shanghai. 7. Still from Higher Brothers feat. Keith Ape's 2017 video *WeChat*, directed by Sean Miyashiro. 8. Left: Ko Sin Tung, *Sunflower and Safety Helmet*, 2017, ink-jet print, 69½ × 54½". Right: Ko Sin Tung, *One day, workers replaced the traditional high pressure sodium street lights with the new LED ones*, 2017, enamel, acrylic, and ink-jet print on vinyl on aluminum plate, 50½ × 47". 9. View of "Alice Wang," 2017, Capsule Shanghai. Foreground: *Untitled*, 2017. Background: *Untitled*, 2017. 10. View of "Yu Youhan," 2016–17, Power Station of Art, Shanghai.

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FIRENZE LAI (CENTRAL PAVILION, 57TH VENICE BIENNALE; CURATED BY CHRISTINE MACEL) Lai's signature human figures—with their unbalanced head-body ratios, and immersed in landscapes rendered in a gloomy, opaque palette—reproduce the stagnant affective space of Hong Kong, a territory whose unique psychogeography emerges from the political residue of the 1997 handover, endemic spatial scarcity, and a ubiquitous pessimistic malaise. In Venice, the corporeal heaviness of these canvases conversed impactfully with Senga Nengudi's panty-hose sculptures on view nearby.

6

NADIM ABBAS (ANTENNA SPACE, SHANGHAI) At Antenna Space, Abbas sutured visible and invisible worlds. Titled "Chimera"—in reference both to the hybrid creature of Greek mythology and to a piece of software used for visualizing molecular structures—the exhibition features works that entwine the human and the machine, bodily sight and microscopic vision. In *Human Rhinovirus 14*, 2016, Abbas projected images of the cold virus on giant floating beach balls, which were batted around by industrial fans. Nearby, two carpeted lab-like chambers seemed pristine and clinically sterile, yet carefully draped rolls of toilet paper suggested the disturbing presence of unseen contamination.



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