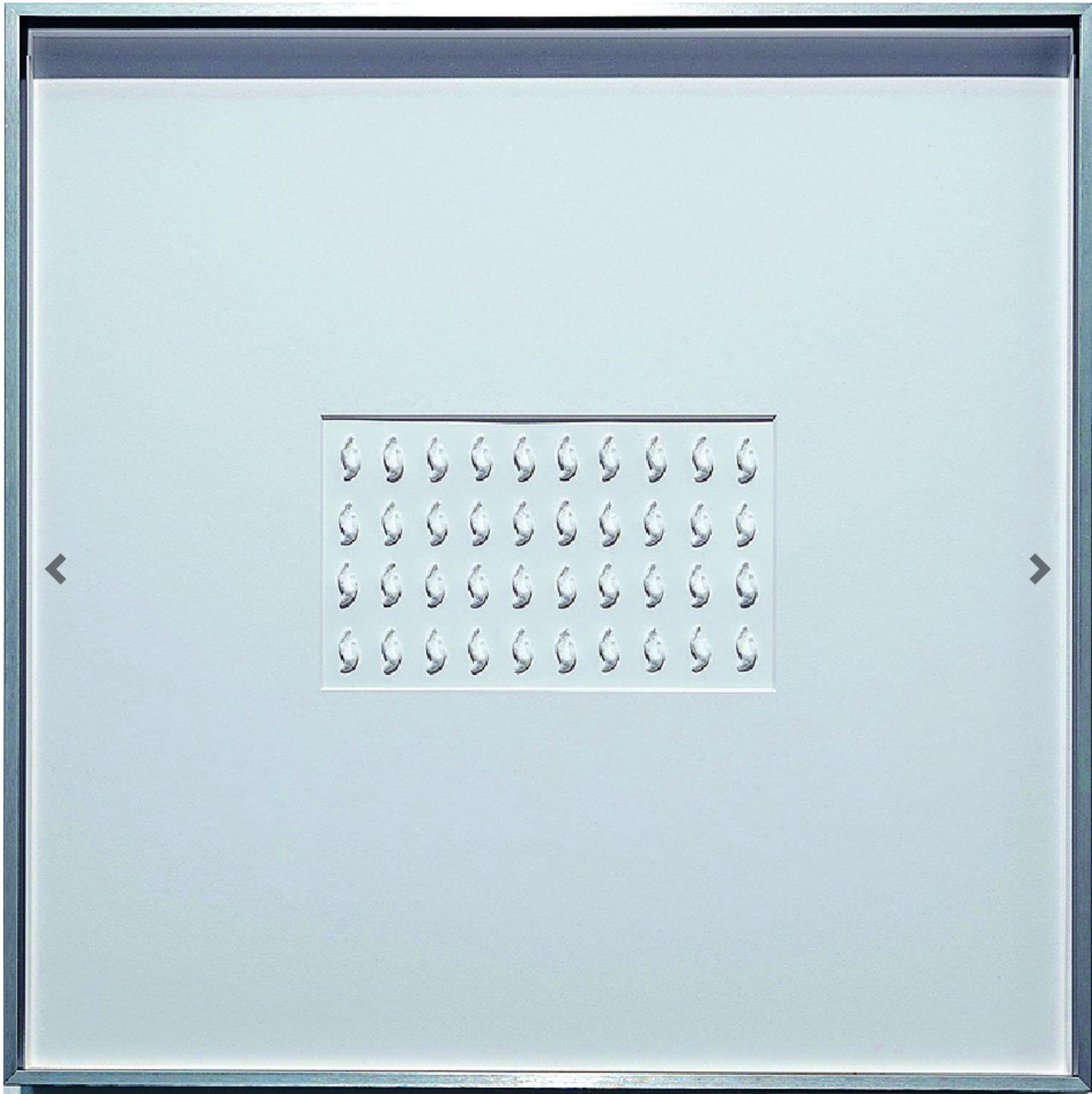




Cure for the blues

Art & Culture | Charlie Ng 22 Oct 2021



Putting masks on, rubbing hand sanitizer the pandemic has made us more conscious of our health than ever. But how can we stop the stress from driving us crazy? ?

Art can be the cure - or maybe distraction?

Gallery Exit is hosting two solo exhibitions which explore the question. Featuring conceptual artist Stacey Chan Lok-heng and autobiographical artist Tobe Kan Kiu-sin, the exhibitions are medically titled: Chan's is called Placebo and Kan's is Panacea.

In Chan's exhibition, she continues to use pharmaceuticals as her material, conferring on them a new form and imagination to explore the associations of medical cures in terms of psychology, beliefs and social customs.



As placebo is Latin for "I shall be pleasing," Chan uses pills in unusual ways to question our view of normality. "I wanted to explore pharmaceuticals as an art material and understand how they are connected to daily lives," she said. "I have been discovering ways to maintain the material as an artwork in a gallery context."

Using hundreds of pills, she spent almost a year working on transferring them into object works or sculptures.

"In society, there is a constant shift in the definitions of being normal or abnormal," the conceptual artist said. "Sometimes I wonder if those who are labeled as abnormal by the normal are actually the normal ones."

Kan approaches the theme in a different way. Her exhibition features a new series of plant paintings and three-dimensional works.

Most of the large-format works were completed in her studio while she was isolating during the most severe period of the pandemic. The smaller pieces were made as a remedy to calm the mind when the situation was relatively more stable - and around the time she was undergoing a minor operation.

The word "panacea" originates from the Greek Panakeia, a goddess of universal remedy in Greek mythology. Kan believes that, in states of stagnation and uncertainty, artistic creation can relieve stress and anxiety.

On the pieces done during self-isolation, she said: "I further developed the way of drawing and explored other drawing materials, making myself familiar with oil pastels."

Six of the paintings were finished in the month when she was recuperating from surgery. "From pale to vibrant, the paintings are a reflection and documentation of me as a painter, gradually recovering," she said, referring to the difference in color tones.

?So is art a panacea? Referencing Canadian artist Matthew Wong, who killed himself after long periods of depression, Kan said: "Art can solve many problems, but not all."

Both artists see research as crucial.

Chan went through books on medicine, pharmaceuticals and science to gain background knowledge. The process is ongoing, she said, as she plans to use different-colored drugs and other medical materials for future designs.

Kan said: "I always want to understand things from diverse perspectives."

That is why her styles, such as the monochromatic shades of blue she uses, are influenced by psychology, everyday life, popular culture, literature and more.

Dreams are also important. She named one of her paintings A Dream after a short story by Franz Kafka, the existentialist writer. "I like the metaphor of a dream, that it is about deep fear or desire. Art making is like dreaming too."

The solo exhibitions will be on display at Gallery Exit until October 30.

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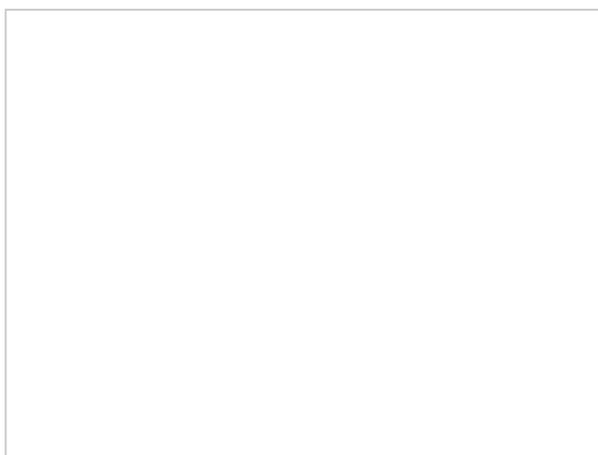


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