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Exhibition at Gallery EXIT features more than thirty new works by three artists



CHAN Wai Lap, Pure Speculation - Michael Clinton. Courtesy of Gallery EXIT and the Artist.

HONG KONG.- Gallery EXIT is presenting 'Let's Try Catching Steam with Bare Hand', an exhibition curated by Jims LAM with the new series of artworks by CHAN Wai Lap, NGAI Wing Lam, YAU Kwok Keung.

'Let's Try Catching Steam with Bare Hands' features more than thirty new works by three artists. Through the use of non-human subjects such as fictional characters, mythical creations and architectural designs, NGAI Wing Lam, YAU Kwok Keung and CHAN Wai Lap, with different artistic practices, backgrounds and modes of thinking, have come together in this exhibition to demonstrate contemporary life as a "nexus" composed of various situations and systems.

As suggested by the title of this exhibition, the attempt to get hold of something as intangible as steam does not yield much success. The Encyclopaedia Britannica defines steam as an odourless and transparent gas. It only becomes visible when miniscule water droplets are formed, giving steam a white, opaque appearance. Hence the illusion that steam can be moulded and shaped into a form. By capturing and magnifying various metamorphic processes, this exhibition recognises change as an active agent that is independent. How this agent creates nuanced relationships with the present is the steam that we try to grasp.

NGAI Wing Lam illustrates different scenarios with man-like fish creatures that are created based on the artist's interpretation of contemporary life and fantasy. Very often, NGAI's paintings that are excerpts of an on-going journey have no beginning or end. Skilfully executed, her oil paintings exude a kind of lightness that is often associated today with the concept of mobility. The lighter we travel, the faster that we can adapt to various situations.

In this new painting series Lay Here and Forget the World, NGAI depicts famous landscapes of Hong Kong such as Tai Mo Shan, Lion Rock and Pat Sin Leng, and intentionally erasing any indicator of time. The central theme of these paintings is "exiling", a word NGAI thinks of as a noun, an outcome. The circular installation makes sure that viewers are unable to distinguish the sequence of the paintings. Neither the beginning nor the ending of the exile can be discerned, and the one or more destinations remain undefined. A lightness flows through her paintings and unites them.

YAU Kwok Keung showcases an artistic research titled Waiting for a girl like you that incorporates numerous artistic media and disciplines. When the clear bottle beer design of the Blue Girl Beer was introduced to Hong Kong in the early 1990s, it gained a huge popularity because of its transparency through which the golden fluid could be seen. As of today, the used bottle of Blue Girl Beer remains a sought-after item among hardware stores, being the best container to showcase different industrial chemicals.

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Well-informed of the marketing strategies of Blue Girl Beer, YAU Kwok Keung soon expanded his research to the making of Blue Girl Beer. The title Waiting for A Girl Like You comes from the renowned TV commercial song broadcasted worldwide in the late 20th century. YAU traces the origin of the blue girl, who is indeed the Greek goddess of Excellence Arete.

The meaning of Arete has changed over time: Apart from being a remarkable modern beverage, its earliest form in Greek simply means moral virtue. It was later regarded by Aristotle as the highest form of human knowledge (the knowledge about knowledge itself). An ancient representation of Arete can be seen today at the only surviving library from the Roman Empire, Library of Celsus, in Turkey, certainly indicating the concepts of excellence and knowledge were made correlated by man. Realising the standard of excellence is itself a construct, Yau, in a similar fashion, applies multiple artistic disciplines such as drawing, moving image, crafts and ritual to find out how concepts of excellency can be shaped and dispensed, and perhaps on a deeper level asking whose idea of excellence it is.

CHAN Wai Lap re-visits of the core values of his artistic practise, that is his keen interest in documenting public swimming pools. A set of seven new paintings called Pure Speculation is created based on his studies of the architectural designs of swimming pools inside different universities in Hong Kong.

For him, these paintings are made in an exceptional time period. Partly, the artist is responding to the "new normal" ever since the outbreak of pandemic, in which the accessibility to university pools has become seemingly impossible. The fact

that we have all been asked to re-define what constitutes public and private spaces (via action in apps) disturbs the power structure inside public facilities. For the first time, CHAN has to create paintings of swimming pools remotely. It has become clear to him that the usual field approach may have become dysfunctional. Therefore, in the attempts to construct these swimming pools, he enters an infinite time loop where he begins to treat these spaces as heritages instead of architectural structures.

More importantly, the construction of these swimming pools has become dialectical, since it is based on artistic interpretation and secondary materials such as old/digital maps and oral interviews. This new series Pure Speculation frees the artist from one specific time and place. The result is close to the so-called untimeliness. CHAN smartly avoids producing representations of vacant monuments locked in nostalgia, but rather produces alienated heritages that stimulate curiosity of the viewers.

With steam being an expired symbol of power, the exhibition attempts to encapsulate the present time by opening up the thought processes of how artists define contemporary life. The notion of nexus, a complex concept seldom mentioned and discussed in the fields of art, are nevertheless important in the work of artists. How the discourse around the nexus and its contemporaneity will evolve is for future research to find out.

