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Lai Chiu-Chen: 99% Unreal

398 West Street

Aug 4th - Oct 29th, 2020



A Moving Migration, 2019. Acrylic on canvas, 51 1/8 x 38 1/8 inches (130 x 97 cm)
Courtesy of the artist, Lin & Lin Gallery and Eli Klein Gallery © Lai Chiu-Chen

Eli Klein Gallery is proud to present a solo exhibition “99% Unreal,” by Taiwanese artist Lai Chiu-Chen’s (b. 1970). This will be the artist’s first solo show in the United States, showcasing fifteen iconic paintings which were done between 2012 and 2019. Lai’s paintings, created during the explosion of access to information, present us with an intriguing look at the portrayal of mundane pop references co-existing within a setting of social, political and economic turmoil.

The 1970s and 80s, when the island was under martial law, was difficult, to say the least. Democratic reform was deemed necessary, whereas political tensions with Mainland China remained at a high level. With globalization and consumerism looming, artists in Taiwan at the time often found themselves in a position where raw materials were abundant, and the tension between order and expressiveness was at its historical high. Lai Chiu-Chen routinely collected and picked up scattered items and imageries at a young age. He naturally grew into an artist that demonstrates the process of piecing together, re-creating and re-developing instead of

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pulling ideas out of the blue. To Lai, the starting point of a painting is never a blank canvas. As is evident in the works included in the exhibition, Lai Chiu-Chen's true mastery is the merging and the creating of very unique bonds amongst the elements of pop culture.

The need to co-exist with political turmoil, while out-maneuvering the fine line between order and expressiveness, forced Lai to become a master of resolving tension. This is exemplified in *A Beauty Launching a Smoke Grenade* (2012), *The Little Sun Spreading Flowers on Hill Top* (2016), *The Umbrella Man Pretends to be a Volcano* (2016), and *A Hot dog with Great Compressive Resistance* (2016). Lai transforms instinctive bodily experiences of weight and heat into visual tensions. On the other hand, the pressure never seems to be overpowering as the characters in these paintings are often depicted in a calm and neutral stance.

The appropriation of common cartoon characters is something Lai also excels in. In his understanding, these personified objects or animals are much more than cute and punchy TV catchphrases. In *Merry Christmas with Mickey Mouse* (2012), *The Fake Mickey Smiling in a Cold Sweat* (2013), and *Hey, Which Eye You Are Using to Stare at Me* (2013), a caricature-esque Mickey Mouse, though portrayed unusually, is the protagonist. Mickey Mouse's influence was world-wide, and spanned nearly a century across multiple generations. When Mickey is introduced to a toddler by his or her parents, it serves as an intro to a hybrid of animal kingdom and human society, that is to say, the digital contemporary. Not only information, but also much of our culture is embedded in this character which is sometimes human and sometimes super-human - whether it's sweaty, or multi-eyed, or deprived of flesh and skin as depicted in these works.

When the Pop Art movement pushed the boundary of fine art to include flipbook-like aesthetics, observation of art migrated from each individual work as a unique subject to a series of works as collectives. These color-filled borders that are seen ubiquitously throughout Lai's paintings put a stamp on each work: this is Lai Chiu-Chen's creation. Lai's paintings, camouflaged by pop references, are witty and thoughtful. The vibrantly colored borders which were intentionally left uncovered, seem to remind us to not abandon the wisdom to look beneath - what's hidden from the appearance might be only 1%, or perhaps, 99%???

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About Lai Chiu-Chen

Lai Chiu-Chen's solo exhibitions include Bubble Kabushiki Kaisha, Lin & Lin Gallery, Taipei (2018); The Twelve Apostles, Lin & Lin Gallery, Taipei (2015); Rainbows Sugar Goblins, Lin & Lin Gallery, Taipei (2013); Plastic Cream, Lin & Lin Gallery, Taipei (2011); Good Morning, Mr. Click, Main Trend Gallery, Taipei (2008); Brick, Main Trend Gallery, Taipei (2006); Residue & Extraction, Home Gallery, Taipei (2005); Parts of Toys, Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taipei (2003); Merely Two Days, North-South Gallery, Taipei (2002); Archives of Separately Packed Bio-material, Eslite Gallery, Taipei (2001); Division Into Two, Howard Salon, Kaohsiung, Taiwan (2001); Scenery Inside Skull, Charming Art Center, Taipei (1999); Colonialism in Body, Charming Gallery, Taipei (1998); and Death, A Mode of Existence, Galerie Crimson, Taipei (1993).

Lai Chiu-Chen's work has been exhibited at institutions internationally including Time & Collection: 2016 Fashion Collection of NTMoFA Design, National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, Taichung, Taiwan (2016); Love Love - Animamix Biennale, Kaoshiung Museum of Fine Arts, Kaoshiung, Taiwan (2013); Rolling! Visual Art in Taiwan, Seoul Museum of Art, Seoul (2013); Innovation & Recreation: Selected Works from the NTMoFA Young Artist Collection, National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, Taichung, Taiwan (2013); Sensible Knowledge, Kuandu Museum of Fine Arts, Taipei (2012); Have You Eaten Yet?- 2007 Asian Art Biennial, National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, Taichung, Taiwan (2007); *A Glimpse of Contemporary Art in Taiwan*, Museum of Contemporary Art Taipei, Taipei (2006); *Scylla and Charybdis in Love: The Challenges Facing Contemporary Taiwanese Artists*, Gwangju Art Museum, Korea [itinerary: National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, Taichung, Taiwan] (2004); *Abnormal Temple*, A Group Exhibition, Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taipei (2000); and *1997 Final Roam*, Abnormal Temple, Sanchi, Taiwan (1997).

Lai Chiu-Chen's work has been collected by major museums including Long Museum, Shanghai; Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taipei; and National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, Taichung, Taiwan, among others. Lai currently works and lives in Taiwan.

A digital catalog with an essay by Cathy Fan accompanies this exhibition.

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