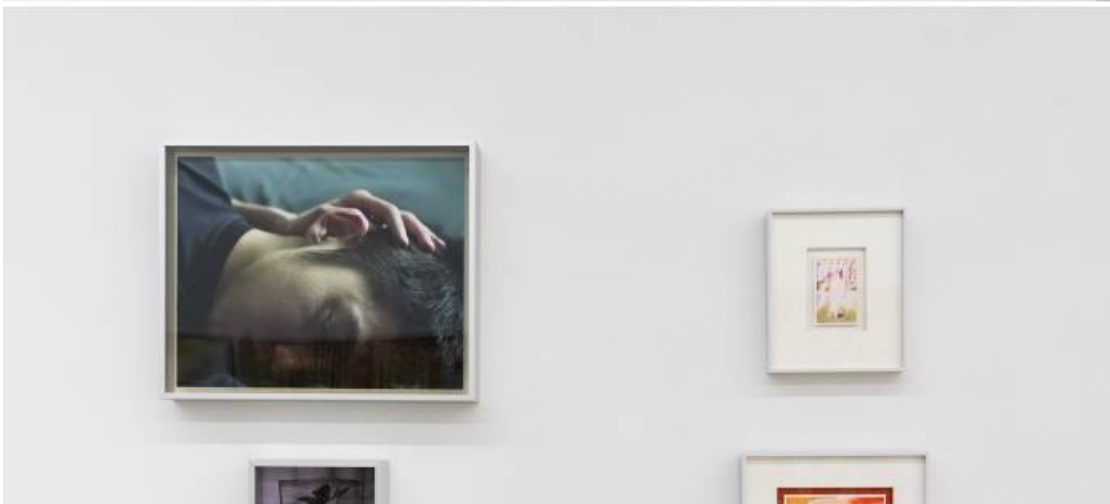




(In)directions: Exploring Queerness in Chinese Contemporary Photography at Eli Klein Gallery

[Eli Klein Gallery](#) in New York City stands as a beacon for artistic expression, continually pushing boundaries and inviting introspection through its thoughtfully curated exhibitions. Currently on view until January 31, 2024, is the mesmerizing display titled "(In)directions: Queerness in Chinese Contemporary Photography." Curated by the astute Phil Zheng Cai and Douglas Ray, this exhibition presents a convergence of 21 talented artists whose lenses capture the multifaceted essence of queerness within the realm of Chinese contemporary photography.





(In)directions – Queerness in Chinese Contemporary Photography – Exhibition at Eli Klein Gallery

The title itself, “(In)directions,” serves as a harbinger of the diverse visual narratives woven into this exhibition. It acknowledges the various paths these artists traverse in their expression of queerness, ranging from bold celebrations of queer bodies to subtle, nuanced gestures hinting at alternate realities. Such a spectrum of photographic expressions mirrors the discursive approaches prevalent in Chinese culture, oscillating between the artfully indirect and the abundantly explicit.

This showcase of diverse perspectives, identities, and beliefs merges the present with the future, inviting critical conversations through photographic images that challenge, celebrate, and destabilize preconceived notions.

At the heart of this exhibition lie artists like Chi Peng, Mengwen Cao, and Leonard Suryajaya, whose works offer glimpses into the fluidity of identities, inviting viewers to witness the metamorphosis of self-discovery. Conversely, the works of William Zou, Xu Guanyu, and Tommy Kha delve into moments that portray fragments of belonging and becoming within temporal and spatial contexts.

A particularly intriguing exploration comes from Tseng Kwong Chi, who playfully blurs the lines between truth, fiction, and identity by embodying the persona of a “Chinese Ambiguous Ambassador,” merging seamlessly with natural landscapes. Such provocative juxtapositions challenge the boundaries between self and environment.

The body, too, serves as a canvas for exploration. Artists like Whiskey Chow and Pixy Liao challenge traditional gender norms, negotiating with art history through their portrayal of media and sexual expression. Meanwhile, Lin Zhipeng (No.223) and Shen Wei capture the diverse nature of desire and memory through intimate portrayals of the body, reminding viewers that queerness is lived, celebrated, and embodied.

Moreover, the exhibition features the evocative works of Zhang Zhidong and Amiko Li, weaving narratives that illustrate the liminal spaces of intimacy and construct rich, often overlooked, stories. Kanthy Peng and Ren Light Pan offer sensual glimpses into the contradictions of queerness – tender yet tense, concealed yet revealing.

The exhibition’s intent goes beyond mere definition; it embraces fluidity, defies boundaries, and beckons viewers to traverse a realm where association trumps definition, where joining surpasses announcement. The unique, documented queer experiences captured by artists

like Yang Bowei, Fang Daqi, and Beatrix Peng underscore personal perspectives, challenging conventions and redefining traditional norms.

Ren Hang, Alec Dai, and Liao Jiaming’s works intersect queer identities with cultural contexts, challenging conservative artistic expressions prevalent in contemporary Chinese culture. Notably, Liao Jiaming’s photobook delves into personal narratives, recounting the experiences of a gay man in a visually engaging manner tailored specifically for this exhibition.

Curated meticulously by Phil Zheng Cai and Douglas Ray, this exhibition doesn’t seek to define queerness within Chinese contemporary photography; rather, it aims to bend, weave, and indirectionally navigate the intertwined concepts of “Queerness, Chinese, Contemporary, and Photography.” The fully illustrated catalog, accompanied by essays from the curators and an insightful interview between Tommy Kha and Ren Hang, serves as a companion on this transformative journey.

Eli Klein Gallery’s “(In)directions: Queerness in Chinese Contemporary Photography” challenges viewers to step into a realm where boundaries blur, identities shift, and art becomes a mirror reflecting the vibrant complexity of the human experience.

Images: Installation views, (In)directions: Queerness in Chinese Contemporary Photography
Photos by Tianxing Xu

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