

Early Summer Notes on Thomas Liu Le Lann

Gangs of players, props and backdrops define the staged and the stages of life, even in apocalyptic times. Who and what surrounds one (through ambition, misfortune and luck) and how this is outwardly presented is central to the dreams, nightmares and limbos that one creates and inhabits. Thomas Liu Le Lann's fragile materials and rigid forms create reciprocal scenes between the theatre of the gallery and the public exposure of his personal life and fantasies. The loving and fucking of those close and chosen are central to the abstracted avatars he presents to his audience. Always informed by sex (and, therefore joy), yet never linear or illustrative, the works are at times rough, tender, humorous, seductive and very nearly always a bit horny. They contain codes and bedside secrets revealed, I suspect, in whispers and moans. His commitment to craft is a seductress forcing a focus on the material transformations elegantly executed of the artist's own scenes: set and lived.

Take the vinyl fabrics and hard plastic accessories in a series he sewed and stuffed. Lanky, glossy abridgments of Astro Boy, a central figure in Asian and, more recently, global popular culture lay draped and casual in exhibition spaces. Kinky in their existence and near perfect in handmade execution, Liu Le Lann tackles an enduring stereotype of homosexual narcissism as they act as stand-ins for lovers and himself (the self-portrait dramatically larger than all others). A recent work saw an arcade claw-machine filled with small take-home versions, spreading himself or other partners around as prizes to an anonymous public. At other times they're weapons (machine guns, hunting knives, machetes) whose ridges and phallic extensions force the mind towards the ergonomic and penetrative. Brutal, not just for the connotations of military violence but, for the way they mimic the possible playthings of advanced insertion enthusiasts. Violence made soft, rather than soft violence and, yet, none are flaccid - all filled to firmness in a permanent bodily echo.

Dichotomies exist throughout: soft/hard, rigid/loose, dom/sub, narrator/character. Look at his exploration of masculine tools and figurative stand-ins trading textile for glass. A rabbit titled for his boyfriend, is translucent and fleshy, in total opposition to the straight man's metallic art rabbit of the 1980s. A hanging chainsaw, in the same material, is aggressive not as the cinematic Texas massacre, but more tender in the way of skin retracting over a head aroused. Glass balls on hooks continue an interest in the aesthetics of BDSM: the bondage butt plug as high interior coat hanger. Aesthetics that bridge bedrooms and communities. Clear and bulky, their glass material remind us of a fragile existence, love and art ready to shatter if momentarily mishandled.

Temporary pleasures transformed to the permanent are everywhere. The flowers delivered to the artist's home each week are embalmed in paintings. Ones to promise to a lover, but enjoyed by oneself. For all its preaching of polyamory and getting around, this work is an artistic love letter from deep inside a relationship. It's a confirmation to the outside, for all to see. But, that can also be the end of the world.

- Mitchell Anderson