

Charles Yuen's Introspective Infinities

ROMANCE OF THE TRANCE

ELIZABETH HARRIS GALLERY
BY RACHEL YUENS

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Projecting decisive and autumnal weight, Charles Yuen's allegorical paintings of loss and negation picture jesters and their brides to be. These are harlequins without a king and thus, structurally disabled from their functional integrity. The impetus of harlequin often, in this identity and genre, is to serve with an ingenious humility, foxy and unlawful when necessary, for and against the interests of his protector. Separated from their superior, Yuen's characters are also separated from their moral stand of dependent inferior and are left in his terms, to melancholic dream and penumbra.

In this series, the artist denies the corporeal specifics in his deliberative handling of introspective design. His figures stand in the midst of nostalgic regrets and fragrances: flowers, netted forms, incense and the hexagons of genetic remembrance. They catch their mirror image at the edges of their vision, staring up from shoe tops for instance, or Janus-faced, are caught thinking of their own bodies.

Walter Benjamin would want for these people to hear the resounding SLAP, the wake up call whose echo would overcome the exoticisms and exorcisms of their symptomatic response to late capitalism.

Yuen may be asserting the handmade image in active repulsion of deceptively effortless media-made imagery. But his primitivism is formal and responsible, and reaches out to the values of iconoclasm from the potent civilization of the "east," as he molds a dough that asserts a double negative of incarnation, frozen by a neglectful promise of infinity.

The characters are confident in their melancholy, presented with skill and felt tools, but are they resistant enough to stand up to the omnipotence of system? Too much to ask, these paintings assert privacy as a value, and thus preclude even as they leave that door ajar. As a romance in trance Yuen seems linked to the symbolists like Mallarmé and the alternate routes of Redon, as well as to Matisse's seductive compromise of materialist sensuality-and

lodged in there somewhere is an emotional link with the introspections of the damaged victor-aesthete of post World War II Europe.

Today, these yearnings are officially countered by the objective calculations of global profit and loss, in the mise en scene of shocking jolts comically spiralling toward monopoly capitalism. So Yuen's paintings, in a sense remember the forgotten, and forget its forgotten other, while examining the narcissism, mirroring, doubletakes and possibly consuming nature of subjectivity left to its own devices.



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