

Cao
Yu

I Have an Hourglass Waist

Exhibition Dates: 4.11.2017–28.1.2018

Exhibition Venue: Galerie Urs Meile Beijing 798

Opening: Saturday, November 4, 4–6pm

Galerie Urs Meile is pleased to announce the first solo exhibition of Cao Yu (b. 1988, Liaoning, China). The exhibition *I Have an Hourglass Waist* will present a series of the artist's highly experimental works spanning such mediums as photography, video, painting, sculpture, installation and performance. The artist uses solemn yet adventurous actions and striking visual forms to carry out unique interpretations of such dialogues as body and self, perception and will, and the experience of artist and viewer, probing the complex relationships between art, meaning and reality. While revealing the connections between art and life, Cao Yu creates a magical field brimming with tension.

The entire exhibition unfolds along the passive engagement of the viewer. Just as they push open the doors to enter the exhibition hall, they are also unwittingly covering their hands in Vaseline. This contradictory exchange of emotions foreshadows the rest of the exhibition, leaving them unable to resist but also imperceptibly drawn in, much as the artwork title, *Perplexing Romance* (2017, vaseline, tissue, dimensions variable), suggests. Their hands coated in sticky Vaseline, the viewers are then lured into the confined, private space of a bathroom, which is actually *The Flesh Flavour* (2017, sound installation, dimensions variable), a carefully crafted sound work. When they leave the bathroom, the stickiness may be gone from their hands, but the psychological sense of unease and doubt follows them into the exhibition space.

The later works do nothing to soothe the viewer's conflicting emotions, but they do not further "violate" them either. Instead, they turn to the artist's body and related matters. At this point, the viewer reverts from "victim" back to bystander. In *The Colorful Clouds* (2017, black bra, 250 × 280 cm), the bra, an object for protecting this very important female organ, is crushed underfoot, giving the audience a sense of instability and the sensation of out-of-place softness. It is like wandering among the clouds, magical yet laden with danger. In the work *The World Has Nothing to Do with Me* (2017, long hair (the artist's own), wall, dimensions variable), a soft strand of hair passes through a small hole in a brick wall, and doubles back to make a knot. It is a play on the saying that "four ounces can move a thousand pounds," and a clear display of an eccentric, stubborn force at work.

We will also present the widely-discussed video work *Fountain* (2017, single channel HD video (colour, silent), 11'10", edition of 10 + 2 AP), in which the artist used her own lactating body to create a seemingly masculine, phallic fountain monument. In the video work *I Have...* (2017, single channel HD video (colour, sound), 4', edition of 6 + 2 AP), the artist speaks dozens of phrases beginning with "I have..." It becomes grating, and provokes jealousy and anger. In the video artwork *The Labourer* (2017, single channel HD video (colour, silent), 9', edition of 6 + 2 AP), a once pure sense of visual beauty gives way to a sense of unease as the artist makes dough with her own urine.

Through these logically and formally related artworks, the artist is unpacking and expanding on the surrounding reality and individual experience while also constructing her own honest, direct and incisive artistic language. The large format artwork *The Female Artist* (2017, c-print, 150 × 238 cm, edition of 3 + 1 AP) is a magnification of a high-resolution scan of the artist's national ID card. Though the information contained in the image is no different from that found on any other ID card, it just happens to be the simplest, most essential description of her as a female artist. In the somewhat sculptural painting series *Canvas* (2017, sign pen on canvas), some of which are monumental in size, the artist has drawn all the warp and weft lines of the canvas with sign pen, and the act of depiction itself becomes the perception and pursuit of material.

At the opening, the artist will stand alone in the exhibition space, within a circle drawn at random in chalk. This performance work titled *The Artist is Here* appears to be an act of self-defense in search of security, but it is also an act of self-confinement. The artist may harbor all kinds of intentions to interact with the audience, but this virtual boundary keeps her standing within, always maintaining her "isolation and independence." As the artist provides narratives that are at times romantic, biting and unsettling, the viewer gains an opportunity for examining existing experience, reappraising the self and perceiving life.

Cao Yu was born in Liaoning Province in 1988, and graduated from the Central Academy of Fine Arts Sculpture Department. She currently lives and works in Beijing. Recent exhibitions include: *THE PUBLIC BODY .02*, Artspace, Sydney (2017); *Kabinett*, Art Basel Hong Kong, HongKong, China (2017); *Prix Yishu 8 Chine Exposition des Finalistes*, Yishu 8, Beijing, China (2017); *Recent Acquisitions—Recent Developments*, Sishang Art Museum, Beijing, China (2017); and *The 3rd Today's Documents—BRIC-à-brac: The Jumble of Growth*, Today Art Museum, Beijing, China (2016); *WHY the PERFORMANCE?*, McaM, Shanghai, China (2016).