

TINA KIM GALLERY

'Revolt of the Body'

December 14, 2023 – February 3, 2024

Curated by Simon Wu

Cole Lu, Dean Sameshima, Lotus L. Kang, Maia Ruth Lee, Tosh Basco

Curatorial Statement

"Oh my god," says the protagonist of Ling Ma's 2022 short story *Tomorrow*, where a pregnant woman discovers that her yet-to-be-born child's arm has extended out of her vagina. Ma continues: "She heard herself saying this as if from afar. It was an appendage of ruddy flesh. It was coming out of her vagina. She touched it. It seemed to shrink from her touch, though it did not completely dart back inside. It was, well, an arm...."

Ma's 'ruddy appendage' has to be moisturized and caressed. She modifies her gait to account for its bend. An incompetent male doctor jokes that her son "may not grow up to be a great pitcher." Living in a near future where the United States is "no longer number one," Ma's protagonist struggles to find healthcare for her appendage, ultimately traveling to see her aunt in "the city of her birth" for solutions. Mixing feelings of a conflicted homecoming with her impending child, Ma's protagonist is ultimately shunned by her family when they find out about her condition. The story ends with the woman and her unborn child waiting in the airport, talking to a group of dismayed white tourists who have learned that their flight home is indefinitely delayed.

This is a "body in revolt": a body pushed through human-produced toxicity and inadequate healthcare; a body engaged in biological warfare against the category of the human; a body that is defamiliarized from its own function (reproduction) into something queer and unrecognizable. It is this spirit that this exhibition evokes: how can the body be remade *through* itself?

Dean Sameshima's *Erotic Dot Series* typifies this radically recombinant body--connect-the-dot paintings that make images of gay sex when connected as prescribed, or something else alien, if you choose your own path. In Cole Lu's sculptures, etchings and drawings, he produces mythic images of celestial and premodern lives. Flesh is reimagined as wirey, ghostly baskets in Maia Ruth Lee's social sculptures--here assembled as a singular column like an arm or a body--and as bruisable, photosensitive surfaces in Lotus L. Kang's drawings. And in Tosh Basco's *hand prayer* drawings, made as the index of a movement practice on paper, these works become flesh in themselves.

Conversations with Basco about radical performance practices provided the second reference for this show, where our title-- 'Revolt of the Body'-- comes from. In October 1968, Japanese choreographer Tatsumi Hijikata (1926-86) staged his final solo performance in Tokyo's Nihon Seihan hall. After being carried into the room in a bride's kimono, he was set down next to a pig in a child's crib. He struck his body against large metal panels suspended from the ceiling while wearing an elongated golden phallus. He changed into a white dress and mimed old age to youth and back again. He suspended himself above the audience on ropes stretched between the stage and the venue's balcony, and to close, stood upright with a fish gripped between his teeth.

Lasting over two hours, this performance, titled "Revolt of the Body," was Hijikata's most intense articulation of *Ankoku Butoh*, an avant-garde movement practice he founded nine years earlier, literally denoting 'dance of darkness' in Japanese. Inspired by French surrealism as well as the writing

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of his occasional collaborator and novelist Yukio Mishima, Hijikata sought to re-invent the boundaries of art, life, and humanity in the shadow of the devastation of World War II. Through movement, Hijikata sought to transform himself into other states of being.

This exhibition explores proto-queer practices like Butoh, and also the alien recombination of Ling Ma's story: premodern and prehistoric conceptions of flesh, sexuality, and time that offer alternative views on modern and contemporary subjectivity and relationships. While these artists don't explicitly cite Hijikata, I see them as exploring the evidence of alternative, rebellious bodies in their practices. When a body is at odds with itself, exacerbated by experiences of gender, migration, or sexuality, how do we mine those conditions for futures of grace and self-transformation?

The conception and development of this show represents a culmination of conversations and friendships—with those who share the desire to shift the lines that exist within formal constructions in art as well as the oft artificial demarcations that exist between the professional and the personal. I am grateful to all our artists, many of whom are my friends: Cole Lu, Dean Sameshima, Lotus L. Kang, Maia Ruth Lee, and Tosh Basco. Thank you to Diana Lee for being a close thought partner on the show and to Tina Kim and her staff for their support.

—Simon Wu

ABOUT TINA KIM GALLERY

Tina Kim Gallery is widely recognized for its unique programming that emphasizes international contemporary artists, historical overviews, and independent curatorial projects. The gallery has built a platform for emerging and established artists by working closely with over twenty artists and Estates, including Pacita Abad, Ghada Amer, Tania Pérez Córdova, and Mire Lee, amongst others. Our expanding program of Asian-American and Asian diasporic artists, including Maia Ruth Lee, Minoru Niizuma, and Wook-Kyung Choi, evince the gallery's commitment to pushing the conversation beyond national frameworks.

Founded in 2001, the gallery opened the doors to its ground-floor Chelsea exhibition space in 2014. The gallery was instrumental in introducing Korean Dansaekhwa artists such as Park Seo-Bo, Ha Chong-Hyun, and Kim Tschang-Yeul to an international audience, establishing public and institutional awareness of this critically influential group of Asian Post-War artists. The gallery partners regularly with prominent curators, scholars, and writers to produce exhibitions and publications of rigor and critical resonance.

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