

SHOWS

JUN 29, 2021

Seeing Double with Yan Wai Yin

BY OPHELIA LAI

YAN WAI YIN, *Localized Blindness*, 2019, still from single-channel video: 19 min 45 sec. Courtesy the artist.

Eye exams seem to be an exercise in failure. Those who require regular optometric check-ups in the first place will likely struggle to read the miniscule letters on the bottom line, or to tell one blurry image from the next. And for these test-takers, the outcome is always the same: varying degrees of imperfect.

Hong Kong artist Yan Wai Yin overturns this binary standard of sight as either correct or needing correction in her video *Localized Blindness* (2019), the centerpiece of her solo show “Black Bird, Frost Flower and Pink Falling Stars” (2021) at RNH Space. Formatted as a 20-minute “eye test,” the video reels through an eclectic sequence of still and moving images as a software-generated male voice asks increasingly tangential and bewildering questions, such as “Do you believe your eyes?” and “What are the chances of seeing another plane on a plane?” Photographs and clips of cotton-cloud skies and hills dotted with transmission towers are cut and spliced into dizzying configurations, each abrupt change of scene punctuated by a mechanical-sounding pip. These segments are interspersed with imagery including a rotating Necker cube, screen grabs of an ancient Greek sculpture’s eye being removed in rendering software, and telescopic photographs of outer space, accompanied by on-screen texts pertaining to literal and metaphorical sight/blindness by writer Oscar Wilde, philosopher Michel Foucault, and psychiatrist Gaëtan Gatian de Clérambault. With its informatic and visual overload, Yan’s eye test devolves into a cryptic meditation on lucidity, illusion, and the loneliness of seeing differently.

Perpendicular to the screen was a wall of laser-cut shapes in clear and frosted acrylic that may recall wispy cirrus clouds, or cartographic line drawings of land masses. The works in fact replicate frost flowers that the artist had photographed and rendered as jagged, two-dimensional forms. On the opposite wall hung five framed works from the series *Falling* (2021–), each composed of a photograph with intricate cut-outs that reveal glimpses of another image underneath. The frost-flower outlines recur as excisions in a photograph of a pigeon on a gray-brick pavement, introducing bright patches of gradient green. In another work, a cut-out meteor shower passes over an image of an arm on a blue blanket. The photographs on the surface always portray a kind of fall—out of a tree, down a slide, or into a slumber—as a means of acknowledging the verb’s multiplicitous meanings. Although falling may connote accident or failure—as when one trips in front of an audience, or bakes a

collapsed soufflé—the artist views the motion itself as value-neutral, one of many possible movements in many possible directions. Moreover, for Yan, the viewing of art is always a falling back into the past, as what one sees is filtered through what one has experienced or learned and encoded in memory. She thus advocates in her compact presentation a practice of collaborative viewing that is decidedly elusive and ephemeral. As she explained, “I don’t consider myself a creator of a single, definitive vision. I want to invite others to share what they see, and it can be different from what those images depict and signify for me.”

Ophelia Lai is ArtAsiaPacific’s associate editor.

Yan Wai Yin’s [“Black Bird, Frost Flower and Pink Falling Stars”](#) was on view at RNH Space, Hong Kong, from May 15 to June 6, 2021.

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