

ISA HO

PREFACE TO PEONY PAVILION, MALAYSIA

November 4 – December 30, 2015

Shalini Ganendra Fine Art

SGFA's Vision Culture Artist Residency is for established talents with a penchant for cross cultural engagement, immense curiosity and organized work process, that all enable the presentation of an informed exhibition at the end of the 6 – 8 week program period.

Isa Ho has straddled not only the cross cultural, but investigated issues of gender roles, generation identities and the self - within the expansive base of contemporary trends. With a warm, dynamic and efficient work process, she has engaged effectively with various players in her Malaysian visual narrative and presents in this exhibition the new works that extend her earlier self- focused narrative of *My Peony Pavilion*, to include third parties who also assume aliases through costume and pose. It has been a pleasure to observe the process, to discuss ideas and to become better informed about regional cultural phenomenon in a localised context, for the development of *Preface to Peony Pavilion*.

These dynamic images, whether they be of Ho herself in character or the invited dancers in theirs, speak to the importance of recognising the links that connect differences, and the richness of common understanding that comes from respecting individual parts. A focused exhibition with seven works that signal the beginning of a new cross cultural, visual dialogue. Coinciding with the SGFA showing, the new works will also be featured in Ho's exhibition in Paris, later this month.

Shalini Ganendra



ISA HO's Photographic Language

To watch Isa Ho apply make-up to a K-Pop dancer is to watch a painter. Her strokes are careful, deliberate and studious. Behind the lens, an even more fascinating transformation takes place. Ho's usually gentle presence turns into someone exacting, certain, sharp. The personality captured within her photographs is brought to life.

Isa Ho, established Taiwanese photographer, has predominantly created work that raises questions about how we construct ourselves in a post-modern landscape. Her themes are as often playful and theatrical, as they might be dark and subtle. Her works are in the collection of the National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, Kaosiung Museum of Fine Arts, Kuandu Museum of Fine Arts and the White Rabbit Gallery, Sydney. She is a winner of the 2011 Kaohsiung Art Award, the 2013 ISE Cultural Foundation award, and has been awarded grants from the Asian Cultural Council for the 2015 Residency program at the International Studio and Curatorial Program in New York. Despite an earlier formal training in oil painting, Ho found her calling in photography, a medium she describes as *'more precise, more honest, more true: when you try and say something about people as I do, it is better that your medium has these qualities'*.

Despite the fantasy of Ho's photo creations, it is reality that Ho is preoccupied with. Social issues are where she finds her inspiration. She describes Taiwan, the country she was raised in, as having a *'unique political culture'*, and her series *I Am Snow White* (1999 – 2010) deals with the Taiwanese identity crisis. In the series, she appears as Snow White, a warrior, and an acrobat - a host of roles in which she *'talks, contradicts, struggles and compromises'* with herself. Ho's concurrent project, *I Got Super Strong Courage* (2008 – 2009), is an illustration of the struggle for female parity between two energies: the expectations from society and self identification. In a quiet relief and contrast, the *Westbeth series* (2013 -) deals with the issue of ageing and was created during Ho's stay at Westbeth Artists Housing in New York. Ho claims, *'I try to never judge the topic I talk about, just show it to the world'*. This unprejudiced attitude forges a relationship of trust and credibility between Ho, her subjects and audience.

This year Ho developed *My Peony Pavilion*, a project that investigates the obsession with K-pop, a cultural phenomenon, a *'fever'*, that has exploded in Asia. Ho believes that K-pop gives *'Asians their own contemporary cultural identity; they are not appropriating western or hip-hop culture. This (K-pop) is actually something Asian's are excelling at'*. Ho describes the genre as *'sister K-pop'*, a genre that connects multiple Asian countries, and is the reason why the residency in Kuala Lumpur through Shalini Ganendra Fine Art, held such appeal. It is here that she completed a subset exhibition, titled *Preface to Peony Pavilion*.

Ho has previously looked at links between Chinese opera and traditional Japanese performance culture, with K-pop. Through research into traditional Malaysian dance, Ho found that there again were strong similarities in the movements and style. *'K-pop is smart. It can teach us something,'* says Ho, and as in traditional dance forms, *'every finger movement means something; the sentence and lyrics are translated into action. It is mechanical, logical, intelligent'*. K-pop is just as choreographed and careful as traditional dance, and requires the same standard of dedication and training; these two dance forms share a foundation through which well informed creativity results.

Ho describes K-pop as a *'dance form made for photography'*, and claims that *'every still reveals something'*. Her previous K-pop explorations have examined how Asian women think about their bodies, but Ho's approach in Kuala Lumpur has been different. Ho was struck that in a country that *'seems so orthodox, so conservative'*, a dance form like K-Pop, so aware of sexuality and physicality, is still enormously popular. Ho has been closely considering the generation gap and cultural orthodoxy of Kuala Lumpur alongside K-pop, examining how the liberation of the younger generation conflicts with the religious traditions and expectations of the elder generation. She has been closely following Malaysian teenagers and their method of creating a character on social media platforms, just as she creates characters in her photographs.

The SGFA Gallery Residence, which will host the exhibition, has featured in her KL project as well. As luck would have it, SGFA commissioned recently a pavilion installation made of bamboo to highlight local design and materiality distinction and innovation. Ho used the SGFA pavilion as a backdrop for one group of new photographs. Ho's exhibition pieces feature dancers in both classical Malay dance costumes and dressed in the K-Pop style, holding the same poses, and complementing each other in their difference. The second venue for the series was the Heli-pad in Kuala Lumpur, at the top of the world, using the same dancers, in the same poses –against a hazy, urban background. The dual locations further support the traditional juxtaposed against the contemporary, the urban against non-urban – none are contradictions but join in a time line continuum that celebrates unity in difference.

Flo Simpson



Select Solo Exhibitions

- 2015 – “Preface to Peony Pavilion, Malaysia”, Shalini Ganendra Fine Art, Malaysia
- 2014 - “Westbeth – isa Ho/Moritz Partenheimer”, VT Artsalon, Taipei, Taiwan
- 2014 - “Tales-isa Ho solo exhibition 2005-2014”, THE 201 ART, Taichungm Taiwan
- 2012 - "Girls/Spring", InArt Space,Tainan, Taiwan
- 2011 - "Girls", VT ArtSalon,Taipei, Taiwan
- 2011 - "Fairy Tales"solo,Instituto Cultural de Mexico, , Texas, USA
- 2010 - "You are my hero", La Chambre Art Gallery, Taipei, Taiwan
- 2009 - "Once Upon a Future", Sakshi Gallery, Taipei, Taiwan
- 2008 - "I got super strong courage", VT ArtSalon,Taipei, Taiwan
- 2007 - "Solo Exhibition", SOKA Beijing, China
- 2007 - "Nacissus", Cans Book Shop, 798 Beijing, China
- 2005 - "To Call me Snow White!" TC284, Taipei, Taiwan

Museum Collections

- National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, Taichung, Taiwan
- Kuandu Museum of Fine Arts/Taipei National University of the Arts, Taipei, Taiwan
- Hong-Gah Museum, Taipei, Taiwan
- Kaosiung Museum of Fine Arts, Kaohsiung, Taiwan
- White Rabbit Gallery, Sydney, Australia
- Gwangju Museum of Art, Gwangju ,Korea



Mayang ulek
Photograph, Pigment Ink on Hahnemuhle
Edition 1/6, 80x62cm
2015



Mahsuri / City
Photograph, C-Print Pigment Ink on Hahnemuhle
Edition 1/6, 80x50cm
2015



Mahsuri / Pavilion
Photograph, Pigment Ink on Hahnemuhle,
Edition 1/6, 80x50cm
2015



My Peony Pavilion, No. 5
Photograph, Pigment Ink on EPSON
Edition 1/6, 20x30cm
2015



My Peony Pavilion, No. 8
Photograph, Pigment Ink on EPSON
Edition 1/6, 20x30cm
2015



My Peony Pavilion No. 9
Photograph, Pigment Ink on EPSON
Edition 1/6, 20x30cm
2015



Preface to The Peony Pavilion
Photograph – Pigment Ink on Hahnemuhle
Edition 3/6, 96x120cm
2015

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Sole to Soul Dance Studio

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