



Pixy Liao and partner Moro. Photo courtesy of Pixy Liao.

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Pixy Liao challenges the Male Gaze in her new exhibit “Your Gaze Belongs To Me”

A woman is seen sitting down front and center, a man is laying on top of her shoulders, his body against a couch. The man's body is relaxed, with his limbs hanging on both sides of the woman, and his eyes are closed. The woman is looking into the camera, establishing her dominance within the environment in the photograph. That woman is Pixy Liao, a Chinese photographer currently residing in New York City. Liao's most recent exhibit “Your Gaze Belongs To Me” opened on April 2nd at the Fotografiska gallery in NYC. The exhibit is her first solo show which includes photo, sculpture and video work from the last 15 years.

When Liao stepped onto the United States in 2006 she had no idea what kind of photographer she wanted to be. She had studied science back in her hometown of Shanghai, China but when she graduated and started to freelance as a graphic designer she realized there wasn't much creative freedom in the career. She then moved to the U.S to pursue photography at the University of Memphis, in Tennessee.

Liao then embarked on an unexpected journey in challenging the male gaze in the media through her art. The male gaze is a term coined by filmmaker Laura Mulvey in her 1975 essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" where she analyzes women in the media and how they are often portrayed through the eyes of a heterosexual man, presented as passive, as an object of male desire. In Liao's work that narrative changes as she experiments with the possibilities of domestic partnership and challenges views on heterosexual relationships. The focus of her solo exhibition will be her photo series "Experimental Relationship," an ongoing project that began in 2007 when she met her partner Moro.

"I really liked him from the first time I saw him," Liao said. "So I was very interested in this boy, and his look. And he was very mysterious to me. So in the beginning, I approached him as a photographer as just an excuse to get to know him. He is actually very willing, like a natural born model, and he always lets me do what I want to do with the photographs."

At the time, since Liao was so far away from family and friends, she didn't feel the social pressure she had been under when she was in China. That allowed her to pursue what she wanted without overthinking. Once Liao started to show her photos to the public, responses surprised her. People seemed a lot more concerned about the dynamics of her relationship and it's 'unusual nature.'

"People were concerned about how is it possible that I found this willing boyfriend to help me do all kinds of crazy, stupid ideas," Liao said.

Liao then stopped to think maybe this is not a normal boyfriend.

"Usually a boyfriend wouldn't be so supportive with whatever I want to do with photos, but he is. So I started to think maybe there is something different about our relationship. But for us, I feel like it's somehow a very natural way in how we bond with each other. So I started to think about how to explain this kind of relationship in a project. And then that became my longest personal project."

When it comes to the newest mediums Liao is exploring, sculpture and video, she is focusing on female experiences and the concept of an evil woman.

"I was thinking about all these female rulers in history all over the world, and there's just so few of them," Liao said. "And usually, people don't really praise them for becoming powerful rulers, people always saw them as bad women trying to take over. So I was really interested in powerful women and female leadership."

In the show Liao translates her thoughts into a concept room. It is built as if someone following a cult had a room to worship these kinds of powerful women throughout history. The room has weird objects all around like figures of men hanging upside down on the walls and photos from her past project 'For your eyes only' which focuses on body parts.

As a subject of the photos herself Liao initially felt detached from her role as an actress in photos. Toward the beginning of her work a professor spoke with Liao about both her and Moro being in the photos. In the future these images would be treasurable, said her professor, not only as art but as memories. Now, around 15 years later Liao understands what her professor meant.

"Now when I see us in the photos I see us growing," Liao said. "Which I think is worth documenting and it's encouraged me to keep taking photos as we are right now."

The relationship between the two not only challenges views of traditional relationship dynamics but of racial stereotypes. Liao is Chinese, Moro is Japanese. Due to a long standing history of conflict between the two countries Liao never expected to have a Japanese partner.

"We really only see the other country in our news, or in film, and how it's portrayed is not very positive, because of the complicated history," Liao said. "And I always thought I'm a very open minded person so I won't be brainwashed. But when I found out he was Japanese, I was very shocked. I never thought that I would have a Japanese boyfriend because I didn't have a good impression of them. Not because I knew any Japanese people in person, but because all these years all I have seen are the TV news."

Being with Moro reminds Liao to never trust a stereotype impression of someone.

"In a way this project is a process for me to discover my true self," Liao said. "So it helped me find what I really like and who I want to be."