



review

Xavier Cha

47 Canal

November 30, 2012 - January 13, 2013

By Ming Lin

Xavier Cha's recent solo exhibition at 47 Canal continues the artist's previous explorations of the physical and psychological effects of technology on the body as exemplified in her performance piece, *Body Drama*, which debuted at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 2011. If in *Body Drama*, the performers' emotions, directed into cameras strapped to their bodies and positioned so as to render their expressions obscure to the audience, proposed a literal stance on the ways in which machines have come to mediate even our most intimate moments, and the physical and emotional isolation that ensues, these new works by contrast form a gesture that is decidedly resolute.

To the viewer entering this recently relocated Chinatown - Lower East Side gallery space, the wall of stares that is met breeds a certain unease. The countenances of various individuals are displayed upon four high definition widescreen TVs, with three placed consecutively on one wall and another in the opposing recess. No doubt this illuminated triptych invokes an uncanny effect. Staring into the vacant expressions, a shade of self recognition slowly arises: there is something strangely familiar in the disinterested, flitting eyes, and yet it's hard to place.

As it stands, this piece may be read as a direct inversion of Cha's *Body Drama* performance. Whereas the previous work, with its focus on the body, featured the slow atrophic processes implicated in becoming one with our technologies, here the emphasis is placed solely on the mental states engendered. Facial expression serves as a conduit to these places of the unknown. The soundtrack to exhibition, designed by Jonathan Coward, furthers the propulsion. Varying and at times almost inaudible are the blips and static pops that make up the undertones of contemporary quotidian soundscapes, drawing our attention to these inert processes.

But, the slack-jawed, vacant-eyed faces, with taught skin tinged by florescent lighting, are not those of wandering netizens hopelessly detached from a sense of identity or place. Rather, these are individuals presently on the verge of or else fully immersed in something one might call sublime. As articulated in 18th century enlightenment texts, such as those by German philosopher Emmanuel Kant, the sublime is a state achieved when one confronts the vastness and infinitude of nature and embraces this position. Cha's subjects, as it were, exposed to the plenitude of information and instances offered by the internet, are inhabitants of a technological sublime. In the appropriately formatted press release, an email exchange between the curator and artist which doubly serves as the exhibition text, Cha emphasizes the importance of coming to terms with our current state of affairs, it is about "accepting the void... and finding joy in the emptiness". In addition, the work serves as an archive of emotions. After all, as our interactions come to take place predominantly by virtual means, facial expressions are distilled into emoticons and laughter into a single "LOL". These images may document a final stage in human physical emotion.

On the whole, Cha seems optimistic. Rather than lamenting this phase of contemporary society in which many of our activities have been relocated to sites in URL, she has seemingly found resolve. Here she documents this right of passage.

47 Canal Street, 2nd floor, New York, NY, 47canalstreet.com/main.php?1=xcl&2=pics



Installation view of Xavier Cha at 47 Canal. Courtesy of the artist and 47 Canal Street Gallery, New York.



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