



Jen Liu: GHOST__WORLD

Jen Liu

Curated by Tanya Zimbardo

April 13 - August 24, 2024

Opening Reception: Saturday, April 13 | 5-8pm

Opening remarks at 5pm

GHOST WORLD: a performance for 4 dancers

Related performance commission at The Lab, April 27 & 28

Jen Liu: GHOST WORLD features new videos, augmented reality, paintings, and glass sculptures. The exhibition coincides with *GHOST WORLD: a performance for 4 dancers* (April 27 and 28), organized by / (Slash) and co-presented with The Lab in San Francisco. It is among the first of ten Hewlett 50 Arts Commissions for Media Arts to premiere in the Bay Area.

GHOST_WORLD originates in Liu's long-term engagement with labor activism and women electronics workers in South China. This project takes up last year's social media phenomenon of "frog mothers," unlicensed street vendors in China wearing inflatable frog costumes and selling frog-shaped balloons.

The artist writes:

At Slash, viral “frog mothers” are “lying flat”* – so flat they’ve become graphics, the sibylline blobs of the iPhone 15 ad campaign.

Social malaise blurs with political resistance in the face of state oppression. iPhone boxes converge with old stories of Chinese wives smuggled in shipping crates. Images of femme glamor emerge with ghostly edges, or as fragments. Mischief becomes a shell for histories of violence against electronic workers and diasporic Asians alike; body parts superimposed on the viewer’s visual field through Web AR speak to the possibility of being haunted by the workers making the phones, and the greater violence of compression in a digital existence.

**Lying Flat, 躺平, describes disillusioned Chinese youths and workers, who’ve opted out of over-work and ambition to merely exist in the face of diminished social and economic prospects. The CCP restricts mention of the term online.*

The exhibition and related performance share thematic overlaps with Liu’s long-term project, *Pink Slime Caesar Shift*, select works of which are also included in the show.

Proceeds from the sales of the sculpture and book editions will be donated to labor activist networks in China. Please visit the exhibition web page for more information about the exhibition and the artist.

Join us for opening remarks and an overview of the exhibition with artist Jen Liu and curator Tanya Zimbardo at 5pm on April 13, 2024.

Jen Liu: GHOST_WORLD and the accompanying GHOST_WORLD: a performance for 4 dancers are supported through a Hewlett 50 Arts Commission in Media Arts. The performance production was made with further support from Creative Capital, Gray Area, UC Berkeley Center for New Media, and the UC Berkeley Art Practice Department. The performance features dancers Tracey Lindsey Chan, SanSan Kwan, Miche Wong, and Áine Dorman. AR and projection mapping by Espii Studios.

Jen Liu is a New York-based visual artist working in video, painting, dance performance, and biomaterial, on diasporic Asian identities, postcolonial economies, speculative feminism, and the re-motivating of archival artifacts. She is a recipient of the Creative Capital Grant, the LACMA Art + Technology Lab grant, the Guggenheim Fellowship in Film/Video, the \Art Award from Cornell Tech, the NYSCA/NYFA Fellowship in Digital/Electronic Art, the Pollock-Krasner Award, and the Hewlett 50 Arts Commission in Media Performance. She has presented work at MoMA, The Whitney Museum, The New Museum, The Kitchen, and Sculpture Center, New York; Royal Academy and ICA in London; Kunsthaus Zurich; Kunsthalle Wien; the Aspen Museum of Art; Henry Art Gallery, Seattle; MUSAC, Leon; the Times Museum Guangzhou, Today Biennial Beijing, Shanghai Biennale, Singapore Biennial, and Taipei Biennial. She has also received multiple grants and residencies, including Akademie Schloss Solitude, Stuttgart, Germany; Para Site, Hong Kong; Pioneer Works, ISCP and LMCC in New York; and de ateliers, Amsterdam, NL. In 2024 she will be artist in residence in Asian Art Archive in America, with solo exhibitions at / in San Francisco, and Blindspot Gallery, Hong Kong.

A Taiwanese-American who grew up on Long Island, Liu was raised on family stories of personal sacrifice and political resistance against would-be colonizers, spanning multiple generations. Her recent body of work, *Pink Slime Caesar Shift*, centers this embodied political resistance, which could also be considered a *genetic resistance*. It's built on a proposal to use the domestic food distribution network in China as a covert information network for labor activism, by embedding secret messages in beef DNA. With lab collaborators, she genetically engineers cow cells to contain encrypted texts on labor and protest, then preserves these lab-generated cells in sculptures, for proliferation in the (semi-speculative) future. Starting with the materials and methods of genetic engineering, she makes film/videos, paintings, and other works that build larger networks of interconnected meaning, integrating suppressed histories, political economics, and media tropes through unexpected and sometimes absurdist combinations.

Despite fantastical premises, Liu's work also emphasizes the use of nonfiction methods, particularly in her video scripts that are assembled entirely from nonfiction texts. Firsthand worker accounts, technical manuals, corporate promotional brochures, and social media posts are collaged together to reveal hidden throughlines of exploitation. Liu also emphasizes the nonfictional stakes of artistic labor by diverting a portion of her artistic income to working activists and NGOs in the field. While science and aesthetic sensibilities become methods to deliver audiences to uncomfortable

truths about contemporary labor, they're also a way to offer concrete support to workers themselves.

Tanya Zimbardo is a San Francisco-based curator and a / (Slash) advisory committee member. Over the past decade, she has locally guest-curated exhibitions and screenings for nonprofit arts and film organizations including the Berkeley Art Center, di Rosa Center for Contemporary Art, McEvoy Foundation for the Arts, San Francisco Cinematheque, and The 500 Capp Street Foundation. As an assistant curator of media arts at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Zimbardo has co-organized and curated numerous exhibitions including solo presentations by Runa Islam, Pat O'Neill, Nam June Paik, and Kerry Tribe. Select co-edited exhibition catalogs include *Bonnie Ora Sherk: Life Frames since 1970* (Fort Mason Center for Arts & Culture), *Public Works: Artists' Interventions: 1970s-Now* (Mills College Art Museum), and *Soundtracks* (SFMOMA). She has contributed to publications including *Feminist Media Histories*, *INCITE: Journal of Experimental Media*, and *VoCA Journal*.

/ (**Slash**) is a nonprofit visual art space founded in 2018 to advance and promote the expanding field of contemporary art in San Francisco through exhibitions, publications, and public programming.