

Brook Hsu  
*Blue Bunny*

Manual Arts  
February 9th - April 30th, 2021  
By Appointment Only

Manual Arts presents its inaugural exhibition, *Blue Bunny*, a solo show of Brook Hsu. Comprised of large shellac ink paintings on canvas and small oil paintings on wood, *Blue Bunny* is mostly green. The color green has been a constant presence in Hsu's work, evolving beyond a passing interest into a graphic, meditative love affair.

Both in titles and in subject matter, the large shellac ink paintings make reference to specific movies and books that dwell on the experience of love. "*Blue Bunny*" is the name of a surfboard in Takeshi Kitano's 1991 film *A Scene at the Sea*. Throughout the film, the girlfriend of a surfer sits on the beach and watches him ride waves on the *Blue Bunny*. When asked what the motto of a blue bunny would be, Hsu writes, "Hop around the sea, scoot along through life!"

On the girlfriend's final visit to the sea, it is raining. She arrives at the beach with a blue umbrella (also the title of one of Hsu's paintings) and scans the coastal horizon looking for her boyfriend. She does not find him, nor is anyone else able to find him. His body lost to the sea, all that remains on the shore is his surfboard.

Across the gallery from "*Blue Umbrella*" is another large shellac ink painting. Two skeletons are depicted having sex between two rows of library bookshelves. The title of the painting, "*Meet Me at the Library*," is sourced from Peter Greenaway's 1996 film, *The Pillow Book*. In a suicide letter to Vivian Chu's character, her lover writes, "Meet me at the library, any library, every library."

Just as reference is often embedded in Hsu's work, Greenaway's movie takes its title from a much older book, Sei Shōnagon's *Pillow Book*, written in 1002. Hsu stacks her references one on top of the other. Beyond just titles, Hsu often works with screenshots from the namesakes of her paintings. By painting various scenes from a movie on top of one another, Hsu is able to present all her favorite scenes at once. The layering of images also recalls a closed book, in which every line and every scene of the book is stacked on top of page after page. Taken in all at once they can be inscrutable in their density. When opened, the images become clear and emotionally distinct, even if the visual remains obscured and rippled.

Alongside the Shellac ink paintings are small oil paintings of landscapes. They contain no cultural or anthropological references. The dominant icon of these paintings is a solitary tree. Sometimes the tree is visible within a green valley of foliage. Sometimes the background is so overpowered by green that the only tangible image is a tree. While not representing a specific geographic location, the oil paintings seem to function as plein air paintings of an inner landscape. The ink paintings look outward to find existing representations of a feeling; the oil paintings are unfiltered glimpses within a destination of emotion that exists beyond language, books, or movies.

The smallest oil painting is the only one with figures. Two skeletons embrace under the cover of leaves. Large and less visible trees are in the background. Are all these tree paintings the same landscape? The same tree in every painting, concealing two dead lovers locked in an eternal embrace? As Hsu has said, "I don't know a story that isn't a love story. It is both the deepest pain and the highest ecstasy."