

Su Hui-Yu

The Cinema of Séance

Front space:

Super Taboo (2015) - two-channel video - 18'30"

Adapted from historical texts, the narrative in the two-channel video artwork Super Taboo came from a pornographic publication, which was previously known as "a small book" (xiaoben), with the same title. In addition to illegal copies of pornographic photos from Japan and Western countries, the undisguised description of erotic scenes is now a mesmerizing vernacular Chinese literature. In this video, the renowned actor Chin Shih-Chieh guides the viewers into a surreal erotic scene by playing the role of an urban white-collar worker who mutters the plots of the "small book" in his hands.

Through the work Super Taboo, Su Hui-Yu leads us back to the 1980s when he was an adolescent in Taiwan. Pornographic content was then edged to the periphery of the audio-visual system and merely tolerated by late night shows, secret rooms in video rental shops, or inconspicuous corners in bookstores. However, banned pornographic content tended to put greater erogenous temptation in our way than that freely accessible to us did. Pornographic content holds its allure at the expense of being salacious, nasty, and immoral. Su's fascination with this subject matter is reminiscent of Georges Bataille who was interested not so much in the pleasures of the flesh but what is classified as 'dirty'. Physically pleasant sensation seems to be perilous and ergo requires the endorsement by the transcendental love or a social context as the foundation. As shown in the vintage pornography displayed in this exhibition, the pink fellatio image is accompanied by the true confession: "we are fellows who suffer in the society where people are snobbish and indulgent in unbridled desires, which is why we should feel mutual sympathy and take care of one another."

The Women's Revenge (2020) - Framed print

Middle space:

The Women's Revenge (2020) - five-channel video - 12'00"

Su's works center around Taiwanese history, memory, re-imagination and transgression. The Cinema of Séance engages taboos of the past and the present while exploring the mechanism of oppression and liberation tied to the island country's cultural values.

Taken together, a few years before martial law imposed by Kuomintang (known as the Chinese Nationalist Party) lifted in Taiwan in the 1980s, a cult-genre of women's revenge films emerged, providing an outlet to the era's desire and the sexual repression under government rule. These productions also signaled the beginning of an immensely transformative period in the country.

Su Hui-Yu examines the borders of bodies, sexuality, along with the entanglement of socio-political conduct and prohibition. The artist paves the way for the possibility of reviewing and supplementing history with his reflective practice, the "re-shooting" of early Taiwanese experimental films. Using cinematic effects and extreme violence, Su brings these cult-films to life in the works.

Back space:

The Glamorous Boys of Tang (2018)- single channel video - 15'00''

In 1985, two years before the end of Taiwan's martial law period, the renowned poet and screenwriter Chui Kang-Chien's (邱剛健) *Tang Chao Chi Li Nan* (trans: *The Glamorous Boys of Tang*) was first screened in Taiwan. The film is a homoerotic fantasy, and was therefore not well received due to the conservative atmosphere at the time. The film's first scene is an inexplicable exorcism ceremony which includes dancing. Next, two pretty boys appear, and when their eyes meet, the scene is suffused with their mutual fascination. The plot also includes disturbing killings, death, and orgies accompanied by dissonant sound effects made with a synthesizer, bizarre and gaudy set design, and ill considered costumes. The combined effect is something like a cult film. Comparing the film to the script held in the Taiwan Film Institute archives, it is obvious that the film has been heavily edited or many sequences could not be depicted in detail. Perhaps the filmmakers could not fully present the radicalism and passion of the screenplay due to budget restrictions, censorship, or marketing concerns. More than thirty years later, with new funding and film technology, Su Huiyu has re-created the film to call together the differently gendered bodies and subcultures of Taiwan's diverse society. The four channel piece can be seen as a re-shooting, a re-narration of the original 1985 version, or the next leg of its journey.