

**DAMIEN
&
THE LOVE GURU**

Alison Yip & Tiziana La Melia
Confessions On Sparkling Hill

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Creature Comforts

It is easy for me to close my eyes and imagine, Tiziana la Melia and Alison Yip sitting on a hill beneath a blanket of stars, sharing confessions. Held together under this cover of darkness, the soft mumbles of their disclosures hang in the twilight, fecund with observation and tied to their own cycles of being. But when I imagine these nocturnal visions, their reflections are swathed in the language of friendship (which is always a poetry of sorts). In that space of dialogue expressions were transmuted, shown here, in tangible form. Spun as spellings of emotive intention, together their plotting, painting, pointing and parodying form a mode of artistic production which reaches out beyond the vale. Their expressions are bound to their sensual encounters with a simple life. Down there, below that star-bound hill of their convivial conversation, I imagine them joyfully bounding towards the precipice, absorbed in their shared journey. With my own eyes still closed, I work to see this formation of conversation and creation, this collaboration of confessions between artist comrades as they bound towards their celestially inspired impressions.

So to begin the story properly, one must crunch your face into a squint and get ready for these two leaping over the void and off the bucolic mound where we first encountered them, and then still squinting, we watch as they go off to encounter the world at large. Down to the big smoke. We would be caught a fool by reducing our heroes to mere vaporous illusions. To understand their journey forward, is to watch them watch the sophisticates of their times, the masters of their own tastes and truths. Those figures who have seen into all the shop windows and admired the values, both material and fetishised. Aspiration never looks as good as when it's fresh, stroking the supple surface of your Brazilian, limousine-scented bath rooms in jewel tones, picking up friends and re-making them with dangling chains that make friendly butt slaps on the path towards the sweet scent of shrimp cocktail, ever sweeter with fruity ambrosia.

You only feel like a clown when you let it slip out, that your life is simply ease. Lumpy proletariats, however, can't easily hide their origins through the illusion of perfectly white armour, tumble dried and air freshened for "making it". Here is to the life of pleasure, the bacchanalia of the petty bourgeois. Limos reach out to wrap themselves around you and fly out around the corner to speed you off. Tube-top crazy in sweet velour luxury. Off to real living, readied with suitcases full of weekend comforts. It is so easy and fun to just get away from it all.

But it's not really that easy to get it all organized and get to go out and get everything you need to feel, you know, well, real. Pleasurable presents come wrapped. Was it that provocateur Christo that showed us how wrapping an object can reveal its social relations? How a coverup can make contents speak louder than shouting their name. That by making it makes it scream its structuralist myths with the growl of a loudspeaker and the dizzying accuracy of an auctioneer. But, and it's a sad part of the story, just how we are also like the commodities. That old wives tale of Marx when he first described our commodified condition, of trade, and our only pleasure forever shaped by these exchanges and how we see each other as the means to these always accumulative ends.

But market economies have made things quite expensive. We can only see the stars refracted through their stylists and screens. We cling to humble beginnings of no inheritance, only to relish in the easy breezy advantages we have come to idealise. And so we live in a world of the upcycle, of regret, of try to get the best possible something for nearly nothing. A world of Kleinanzeigen negotiations, of Craigslisting everything. These exchanges also have their gritty human dimensions. When you see what you need on the app, there's no guarantee you'll get it. Marketed as available objects of transformation, it is an unregulated space for swapping signifiers. The packaging of these cast-ons need not be pristine, a gesture more than a swaddle, an attempt to look like you care with ragged canvas. But, and it's a big but, it is the value of that first impression which is the true temptation, regardless of how fulfilling the use of these nearly new fangleds hold for their wanton consumer. While shopping for Magic one day, all I got was this washed-up top hat loaded up with a stuffed not-really-bunny and bottle of bubbles with the promise of *Freiheit*. That party was over before I started. Another time, while in search for my youth, I was left with a fistful of action DVDs and an evening of car chases and empty platitudes. I didn't know what made me sadder, that the vacuum was broken when I got it home or that the biker gouged me on the purchase. I got home and plugged it in and it started to smoke. I turned it on and it blew his dust all over my Wohnzimmer. My lifeworld.

These exchanges emerge for me from these artist's wrapping their canvas, their brushes, their playlists, their algorithms around these objects of fascination. I have sat in bars with friends (that communicative space of sharing again) and made up stories about people who were sitting there, imagining their life and exaggerating their visible qualities for effect. I get pulled into this same game here, teasing the tales from what are often broken associations. From their broken objects, objects of questionable use, objects of questionable origins. I enjoy this game, asking what is what and what is from where and what is for what. Our own struggles with these commodities come to the surface and we might glimpse, for a moment, what we mean with them, through them, in taking the time to gather, distribute and arrange them. Their tales are as associative and speculative as we are ourselves, our deeds recorded in the ledgers of form and exchange, our desire traced the silhouettes of stuffed stuff.

Holly Hobby looks like she doesn't need stuff. Her adorable patchwork attire is humbly accessorized with only a tuft of field flowers. These blossoms are small enough to not offend, simple touches of blue against the dusty earth tone mood of her country apron. Her blue bonnet gives the impression that she is also of the sky, an anthropomorphised horizon of sorts with the floppy brown boots keeping her tied down to stop her from disappearing into heaven. She is eternally a silhouette, a container for lost remembrances of a simpler life, of a time now gone but imagined from our skyscraper seclusion. Though initially left unnamed, and at that time simply referred to as "blue girl", Holly eventually took on the cutesy name of her New England creator. Her popularity as a rag doll is well known, but we still know little about her other than her apron of many colours and how gently she clutches her modest keep. As a canvas vessel, stitched together in the home spun hobbyist culture of the 1970s, she could be stuffed with our desires of country or urban cosplay. If kindness is wellness, she may be its spring. But the weather has changed and the well is dry. The blue bells have faded and the war is done. Her empty graphic transmissions of promise for a quiet way, a time of naive contentment, are now empty husks. We may still slip on her idealised portrait of yore, but our past will always look rosy in the harsh light of the present. How do we resolve these yearnings of bucolic revelry with only Amazon Prime loaves of bread?

And so, maybe back to the grassy knoll. Back to the revelry of the stars. Back to being together, not always separated by expectation and use. This sentiment also pervades this object based landscape of sculptures and photos and videos and paintings. Surely it is dialectical, if also scatological. Just as surely as it is also both Modern. The architecture of tourism was erected for this need, mimicking nature for our convenience or marking it with habitable wood clad getaways. In search of spirit, some make it out past the Outlet Shop, past the temptations of the Casino even, and head for the hills. Tesla tires covered with mud spin out and splatter the rear window. They feel alive. Holding hands, they step out onto the tufts of grass. Dew covers their pedicures. The moon gets caught in their eye, short shorts caught in the wind. Taking a deep breath of nearly fresh air, they ready themselves for the journey back.

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