

# DEBORAH SCHAMONI

## *Fleshing Out The Ghost*

Lotus Laurie Kang, Jumana Manna, Anh Trần  
29.06.–12.08.2023

Deborah Schamoni marks the gallery's tenth anniversary with *Fleshing Out The Ghost*, a group exhibition curated in collaboration with Nikola Dietrich.

Works in the exhibition by Lotus Laurie Kang, Jumana Manna, and Anh Trần draw attention to multilayered, and ongoing constructions of gender, identity, and the sources of inequality. They document how processes of history and personal memory influence and act upon bodies and collective memory. Reflected in them are transformations within cultural narratives, particularly those that allow us to examine contradictory histories of gender, colonial legacies, and experiences of displacement. Each of the works on view – Lotus Laurie Kang's photographic installation and objects, Jumana Manna's sculptural pieces and collages, and Anh Trần's paintings – emphasizes the sensitivity of material relative to the body and the forces that continue to shape and affect it.

Multiple strips of exposed photographic film cascade from the ceiling to the floor. Sensitive and responsive to its surroundings, Kang's work reacts to its environment much like the skin on bodies moving through the space does. Like a permeable membrane, it continues to absorb light and moisture over time, charting a series of ever-fluid moments.

Baby rats cast in colored glass are positioned along the gallery's interstitial spaces, at the junctures between walls and floors. A kind of liminal being turned figurative embodiment of migration, they are placed where the artist locates the mesoderm, the middle cellular layer during embryonic development; there is an impulse to transpose those inner layers to the spatial structures of the gallery. Made from grains of sand, they remind us that glass can also act as a vessel, it can serve as a carrier of inherited memories.

Jumana Manna's torso-sized ceramic objects relate to bodies and infrastructures with surfaces and skins in shades of eggshell and coral. The sculpture, *Ghost ii* (2023) from the *Cache Series* exudes an air of childlike playfulness. Its abstract form, with dentine legs, rounded edges, and a hollowed body, draws from a once common structure for grain storage in rural houses across the Levant. Built into homes, the "khabya" – which means "the thing that hides" in Arabic – would preserve the annual grain harvest for family and communal consumption. With the advent of refrigeration and state-centralized grain silos, khabyas became obsolete and can now occasionally be found in the remnants of village structures; an architectural ghost of a ruptured relationship to the land. *Extra* (2021), the second tubular sculpture, refers to forms that serve as extensions of our own bodies, specifically water or sewage pipes, typically underground or behind walls. Amalgamating limbs, pipe units, and archaeological finds, the 'limb-pipe' emphasizes the overlapping relations of infrastructural maintenance and care that remain unnoticed until their moment of collapse.

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Continuing the theme of land and hygiene systems, Manna's *Cleaning Collages* are made from cut-outs of chemical cleaning product stickers. Meticulously composed, they play with classical western painting genres of still life and landscape; replacing the ideal with an impoverished fantasy copy of generic pastoral non-places.

Anh Trần's paintings find the artist co-mingling various techniques of color- and paint application, drawing on a variety of historical references that bridge traditional Eastern painting and post-war Western painting and how they intersect with both her own history and that of Vietnam. The personal aspect is conveyed both textually and physically onto the canvas; like the (macho, male-dominated) painters of American Abstract Expressionism, Trần's working process unfolds on the floor or against the wall, shifting vertically and horizontally. It involves gestural movements guided by a push and pull principle, using rapid brushstrokes and deliberate marks made with spatulas, sprays, and fingers. However, a different kind of sensibility emerges, not only that of what might be called feminist appropriation, but of a body that is not yet solely encoded by Western norms. It comes with its own grammar and syntax. The results are "surreal" and ethereal-seeming colors, a palette that evokes a kind of tangible connection to other imaginative places and people.

"It feels like you are not shaking the ghost off but inviting them in for a more extended conversation that seems to collapse time and mirror the part of your interior world that imagined yourself in the interior of the ritual."<sup>1</sup>

– Nikola Dietrich (translated from German)

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<sup>1</sup> From a conversation between CAConrad and Lotus Laurie Kang in: *In Cascades*, Lotus Laurie Kang, Hurtwood Press Ltd, July 2023