

RAINRAIN

Craig Jun Li
of

September 13 - October 26, 2024

"But still, it isn't a game, if there is some vagueness in the rules".—But does this prevent its being a game?—"Perhaps you'll call it a game, but at any rate it certainly isn't a perfect game." This means: it has impurities, and what I am interested in at present is the pure article.—But I want to say: we misunderstand the role of the ideal in our language. That is to say: we too should call it a game, only we are dazzled by the ideal and therefore fail to see the actual use of the word "game" clearly.

-Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 1953.

Printed images perhaps become prosthetics for a late-Wittgensteinian understanding of the way language itself fails and is facilitated, instead, by a persistent sense of play. Where language is limited from bridging participants through some perfectly shared cognitive image, interrogating the way that materialized images themselves fail both physically and in their proximity to the material world adds a dimension to the game-like way that misunderstanding structurally functions.

Across images and the material world that they depict (and which then engenders them), misrecognitions build themselves into the dripping strands that act as connective tissue between the sculpture, found objects, and various printed media that make up Craig Jun Li's exhibition *of*. Between kinetically stretching, digitally printed meshes and silicone image translations of x-rayed artifacts (potentially facilitating future cast reproductions), I navigate the gallery space in proximity to two thoroughly contained fields of clutter: a scattered arrangement of artifacts that drape over and find support on a set of minimally fabricated stands evasive of descriptive categorization. If scaled up, such supports might find reference in a type of museological display or the types of stands where fruit is sold on the street in nearby Chinatown; if scaled down, perhaps a variation slant step—the post-minimalist squatty potty discovered in 1960s California.

Throughout the exhibition and in a number of various matrices that overlay each other, artifacts of new information emerge. Diptychs of panels include grids of polaroids, cast silicone, cut acrylic, digital prints—forced connections resisting legibility to the point of their contents becoming less prominent than their modes of circulation and physical manifestation. Perhaps as confirmation of this dynamic, the audience encounters a crop of Giotto di Bondone's *St. Francis of Assisi Preparing the Christmas Crib at Greccio* from 1300CE, a notably early depiction of the back of a cross as it is framed out in unpainted lumber and devoid of its front-facing image or ornamentation, in one nested silicone panel. Surrounding it: an etching of a sliced anatomical figure peering through a sliced SLR camera.

At the core of the work, I notice a specter of studio photography—both historical teaching tool and mechanism for categorization—appearing faintly as anchor for the gap between objects and their presentations. In one sculptural

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work, a referenced plate from the late 19th century Scottish ethnographer John Thomson—who established one of the earliest significant photographic records of Chinese cultures in his 1873 collection *Illustrations of China and Its People*—depicting a number of fruits in a classic still life arrangement seems to spill out in sculptural form in various modes of degradation: allowed to rot before casting and heavily patinated by submersion in acidic compound.

This freezing of time, through both ephemera and implied-but-absent peoples, undermines the way that a composed, frozen image is historically understood towards highlighting and defining the ideal. A fable-like, non-hierarchical relationship seems to emerge, one in which being dazzled by the ideal allows embrace of misrecognition, in which Wittgenstein learns to flirt through logical reconstruction of language cognition, in which you go to the archive only to be distracted by the stitches in the binding, leafing through the pages and noticing: *I'm hungry.*

-Coco Klockner

About the Artist

“CJ” Craig Jun Li (b. 1998, China) is an artist based in Brooklyn, New York (Munsee Lenape land). Driven by research interests in circulation and semiotics, Li’s work often configures as inconstant installations utilizing perishable materials and architectural elements. Their practice aims to investigate the oscillation between a given subject and how it’s perceived in relation to image and material production.