Sin Wai Kin,

Press

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SIN WAI KIN with McKenzie Wark



Portrait of Sin Wai Kin, pencil on paper by Phong H. Bui.

Sin Wai Kin brings fantasy to life through storytelling and moving image, performance and writing. Their work realizes alternate worlds to describe lived experiences of desire, identification, and consciousness. Sin's film, *A Dream of Wholeness in Parts* (2021) was nominated for the 2022 Turner Prize, as well as screened at the British Film Institute's 65th London Film Festival. Their work has been featured in solo and group exhibitions internationally. In mid-February Sin joined McKenzie Wark on the *New Social Environment* (Episode 1160) to discuss their new exhibition, *The End Time!*. The conversation that follows touches on concepts of narrative and storytelling, how Sin uses characters to explore different social constructs, and what it means to be making art in a time when artifice is no longer the antonym of authenticity.

McKenzie Wark (Rail): Wai Kin. How are you? It's a pleasure to meet you, at least virtually. This work is really lovely and interesting to me. The show itself is called *The End Time!*, and one of the works within the show is a two-channel video called *The Time of Our Lives* (2024). Can you just tell us a little bit about how the show is installed?

Sin Wai Kin: Yeah, absolutely. The heart of the show is a two-channel video installation, which is a kind of expanded science-fiction sitcom that uses the idea of relative time to think about how reality is also relative and not absolute. So it's a two-channel installation where you have one channel that's the sitcom, and there are actors performing in an open set. The second channel is the live audience watching the sitcom. As a viewer, you sit between the two screens, and you decide where you position yourself in that relationship.

There's another work in the exhibition called *Essence* (2024), which is an advertisement for a conceptual men's cologne. The campaign features one of the characters in my practice called Wai King, who is a drag king character. He's on this hero's journey to find what is intrinsic to his nature. The slogan of the campaign is "Your true self awaits." There are also props from both works in the exhibition. So you have the wigs which the characters wear on busts, as well as the flowers which appear in the center of the sitcom set. There are bottles of the Essence cologne. They're actually filled with perfumers' alcohol rather than a smell. I started working with a nose to try to develop a scent, but I realized what made the most sense for this object was for it to really be a prop. For it to be symbolically empty, there should be no smell at all. If we're thinking about, you know, what is intrinsic to our nature.

There's a few ideas that I pull from broadly, like theories of general relativity and quantum mechanics to play with the idea of time. There are references to creation stories and to different cultural mythologies. I'm really thinking about the act of storytelling and how storytelling exists in different ways, how we're immersed, through advertising, in popular media—how it not only represents but also creates reality.



Installation view: Sin Wal Kin: The End Time!, Canal Projects, New York, 2025. Courtesy the artist and Canal Projects. Photo: Izzy Leung.

Rail: I guess the first thing I want to ask you about is character design, and then designing a world that those characters will populate. Can you tell me a little bit about the process of character design, if that's how you think of it?

Sin: In my practice I probably have something like ten characters, because some characters are two-in-one, or one character split into two, depending on how you look at it. But every character in my practice is looking at a different binary that I'm trying to undo or have a closer look at, or a different area of research or a different kind of concept. So for example, in *The Time of our Lives*, there's a character called The Storyteller who keeps on popping up to deliver these news bulletins and generally interrupt the narrative. And The Storyteller is—like all my characters—a character that reappears in different works, in different guises, but often as a news presenter. He's a character I use to think about the act of storytelling, what the possibilities and the realities are in terms of the power of storytelling.

Rail: Do you think of all your works as occupying the same universe?

Sin: I think they're in parallel universes. By combining these characters in different relationships in different contexts I'm able to look at a problem or whatever I'm thinking about from different perspectives. I think that it inevitably ends up that every work is like another window into this universe that's expanding in my practice.

Rail: I'm intrigued by the doubling or splitting of characters, because that seems like an instant way to sort of start creating a narrative line through it.

Sin: Yeah. There is a character in my practice called The Construct, whose face is partially inspired by the face of the Dan role in Cantonese and Peking opera, which is often the lead female role—usually a romantic interest of the lead male role. And I've created two faces for that character, to represent this internalized false dichotomy of good and evil, or victim and villain, especially as it relates to representations of femininity. They appear in *A Dream of Wholeness in Parts*, moving through scenes. In different scenes, they appear with a different face.

Rail: I wanted to ask you about makeup. The art of drag seems to be one of the sources of creating the looks. Can you tell me a little bit about creating the visual appearances of these characters?

Sin: My first character is the feminine character that appears in *The Time of Our Lives*. That character appeared in 2013 and definitely has a very drag influence, very Western drag. This is a character that I used to think about my relationship with Western femininity. So it's about parodying, exploding and holding a magnifying glass to femininity as it's constructed and conditioned within Western and European context. It's looking at how femininity is intrinsically linked to whiteness in these contexts.

There are other characters that come from the influence of, as I mentioned, Cantonese and Peking opera. There are characters whose makeup comes from a story that I illustrated, and then I put onto a face. There's lots of different costuming practices that I'm drawing on to create these characters.

It is important for me to think about the context that the characters are in as much as the characters. I find that there is a tendency to focus on the construction of characters. And I think this reflects how we are conditioned to focus on individuals. There's also the construction of this whole sitcom world in this work, which was informed by watching a lot of sitcoms and looking at the relationships that make up the visual language of the sets, the language of the edit, the language of the graphic design of the title sequence. And using all these tools to create this specific relationship of the characters to their contexts, and so to set up all the expected relationships that come with the context of the sitcom. So you immediately understand that there are certain tropes you're going to see played out between these characters when you have a feminine and a masculine character opposite each other in this open set.



Sin Wai Kin, *The Time of Our Lives*, 2024. Initiated by Accelerator and co-produced with Kunsthall Trondheim, Canal Projects, and Blindspot Gallery, supported by Vince Guo. Courtesy the artist.

Rail: It's one of the classic sitcom scenes: the male character enters and says, "Honey, I'm home!" to the female character who is already in the domestic space—and all the ways that's coded. But then we never quite move on to the narrative arc that a sitcom would have, and we end up in a different space. And so, what happens if this is not the time and space of the narrative of television?

Sin: So within the work there are two clocks on the wall of the open set. One is a doomsday clock, which is a prop that I had made that is replicating the doomsday clock, which is a clock that was created in 1947. The time is set by a group of scientists to indicate how close we are to the end of the world, if midnight is the end of the world. Right now, we're eighty-nine seconds away from midnight. It's the closest we've been yet.

And on the other wall there is a clock that indicates whether we're in the past, the present, or the future. Time jumps around, but the narrative structure is actually cyclical. I'm trying to present this binary impression of cyclical vs linear time as a reflection of the structure of narratives.

The characters keep on talking about the hero narrative and that's a way of thinking about different models of narratives that are possible, like Joseph Campbell and hero narrative, or Ursula Le Guin's book *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*, and the way that she describes the structure of narratives. Hero narratives tend to happen along one line and have a beginning and an ending. There's usually one character who conquers something, violence is often connected to some sort of realization, and then it ends, and there's a clear moral element. This is opposed to the carrier bag narrative, which is a story that can hold many things together at once. It might not completely make sense, and it might have conflicting ideas that are somehow held together. But it's a narrative that will immerse you and will hold you within it, and you can make up your own mind about what's meaningful.

Rail: I think in the United States at the moment we're living with people who feel like they are the hero of a hero narrative. It's a little terrifying to even contemplate. I'm reminded of a famous Sun Ra line, which is, "It's after the end of the world. Don't you know it yet?" And there's a sense in which this piece sort of stages that moment. I think it's probably a consensus among anybody who's paying attention that a certain world, a particular world, is indeed ending. And how does one make narrative art if that's the case?

Sin: I think it's important to be making stories now for worlds that we want to be a part of. I think storytelling—especially fantasy and science fiction—can do many things. They can create an escapist context where you can leave your current context and be immersed in a different world. What I realized when I started to get back into science fiction as an adult, was that there was not just escapism there. From that other perspective, you can leave your current context and have another perspective. It allows you to look back at your everyday situation and realize how it could be different. That's something that I thought about again when I started to see people interacting with the installation. You have these two screens that are setting up this binary relationship of a performer and an audience, or performance and authenticity, which I'm trying to undo. In order to see the entire installation, in order to see both screens at once, people started to stand outside of the installation. It makes me think how you have to be outside of something in order to completely see it.



Installation view: Sin Wai Kin: The End Time!, Canal Projects, New York, 2025. Courtesy the artist and Canal Projects. Photo: Izzy Leung.

As somebody who has done a lot of performance, I'm aware of the unspoken social contracts that come with certain situations. When you're interacting with somebody, there is an agreement that whatever reality you're performing is true. That relationship became clear to me when I started to perform this first character, which was about my relationship with Western femininity. And what I noticed was that when I looked completely different, when I was this character, then I was treated completely different, and then I acted completely different. I was mostly performing in bars and clubs, queer contexts at the time, but, even there, as soon as I didn't look like myself, I was treated differently, and I was able to see how people perceived me in my everyday embodiment. I think about this act of costuming, and this act of drag as a kind of embodied speculative fiction, so that you can kind of have this view from elsewhere. How do I experience the world if I look like this, how does that change things?

Rail: In a way, drag is science fiction.

Sin: Definitely. I made a lot of realizations that still ground my practice through that process. Seeing this relationship of becoming together constantly with our context, with everybody who is perceiving you at every moment. So there's that element of the audience watching the performers, but really everybody is acting. I mean literally, the audience is made up of twenty-five actors. It's another way that I'm trying to undo the binary position of performance and authenticity, acting and perceiving.

On the screen there is a mirror image of the cues that a live audience watching a sitcom would see. You mentioned laughter. I also added sympathy and arousal. It's mirrored because, you're not necessarily part of the audience—you know you're seeing the back of those cues. You know that you are in this in-between space of the performer and the audience, and you have to think about your positionality in that space.

Rail: What happened to authenticity in twenty-first century culture? It's no longer the antonym of artifice. Something can now be authentic and artificial at the same time.

Sin: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, it's ironic that we're living in a time where politicians are TV personalities. Performance and politics are completely intertwined—

Rail: Which makes me think of the other work, *Essence*, that appears in the show. It is an advertisement for men's cologne. I was curious what the perfume was, but that it has no essence strikes me as kind of apropos here.

Sin: Yeah, so the cologne ends up being a prop for the cologne advertisement, which advertises the prop, which is a prop for the advertisement—there's a circularity there that exists in a lot in my work. The advertisement for the prop is also trying to point towards the fact that there is no such thing as truth in who you are. You know, the truth is exactly what we agree that it is—there is no original to hearken back to, no truth of embodiment, of what it is to be a person. Humans are animals that completely construct the environment that our brains and our bodies are shaped and grow in. So, there is no such thing as natural or unnatural. It's whatever we decide that it is. And the narratives that we put out, whether in popular media, advertising—even in science—create that reality.



Sin Wai Kin, The Time of Our Lives, 2024. Initiated by Accelerator and co-produced with Kunsthall Trondheim, Canal Projects, and Blindspot Gallery, supported by Vince Guo. Courtesy the artist.

Rail: The fragrance in the commercials is a fragrance for men. And I'm kind of curious: is there a kind of futility to the search for the essence of masculinity, as a thing that's going on in the culture?

Sin: Absolutely, yeah. Futility is a word I would use to describe the feeling of a lot of aspects of this exhibition. I think it's also why I use humor so much, because you just have to laugh.

Rail: And in the *Essence* commercial, your character is riding a horse. So we get these horse close-ups, like big-tough-beast-staring-at-the-horizon kind of stuff that reminds me of old Marlboro ads.

Sin: Well, I watched a lot of cologne advertisements in preparation and tried to reproduce as many tropes as I could.

Rail: I should correct myself: what it actually reminds me of is Richard Prince's images that were taken from Marlboro ads. So there's mediation in between.

Sin: I try to use these visual languages that we're so used to consuming to kind of lull you into that expected relationship, and then complicate it.

Rail: The thing is, everything about the makeup and costume and set design is just so stylistically consistent and finished. I'm kind of astonished by the level of sheer virtuosity around all of those things. And I'm curious about your relation with all of those mediums.

Sin: I think filmmaking is rarely a solitary medium, especially for something that has a production level that *The Time of Our Lives* has. It took a lot of collaborators to make this work happen. I collaborated with set designers, stylists, a cinematographer; I had an assistant director for the shoot. Then there's a whole production crew—it's an incredibly collaborative medium, and I really like that about filmmaking. But then sometimes it is solitary. When I am back in my studio after the shoot, and I'm starting to edit it, starting to piece it together. But then more people come on board for the post-production to do the VFX backgrounds, and composite everything together. I work with an incredible colorist, Andi Chu, who's done a lot of my projects. Every aspect helps to create the world that you are immersed in.

Rail: We're talking about ends and beginnings. So what's the beginning? Are you someone who sketches initially? What's your working method, if we go right back to the beginning of a work like this?

Sin: The beginning is usually writing, and even before that, researching. I spent about six months gathering my sources before I started to write this work. And the sources are very broad, from the inner chapters of the *Zhuangzi* to *A Brief History of Time* to *Black Quantum Futurism: Theory & Practice* to my dream diary and journal entries. There's a lot of personal material in this script too. Some of it is more disguised than other parts, but if you see the work, then I think you can understand that there is a lot of very personal material there. Another binary that I often come back to in my work is something that I saw on a note card in Octavia Butler's archive: "the more personal, the more universal." And so I often start from a personal place, and then use a lens of fantasy or science fiction, and draw on lots of other references to abstract the personal into something that other people can project their own experience onto.

Rail: The beauty of it for me is—given the infinite source material from which you could draw, just sitting at your laptop—how you create something that has form and style and makes disparate elements hold together in a world of infinite noise.

Sin: You know that meme of the guy with a whiteboard behind him, full of all kinds of notes? That's how my writing process starts. I print out lots of different notes and cut them up with recurring things highlighted; I put them next to each other, tape them together, and try to find the through line and see how all these things connect.

Once I have organized the chaos on my large bulletin board, then I start to look at it again, and I start to write what eventually will become a much more cohesive piece of writing, which then becomes a script, which becomes a shot list. There's lots of storyboarding. I was lucky with this script. It was initiated by Accelerator in Stockholm, which is attached to Stockholm University, a school well known for its physics department. So I worked with an astrophysicist who read over my script to help ensure my science was as accurate as possible.

Rail: You're making me wonder how, in the twenty-first century, an artist can give someone a glimpse of a totality, or wholeness, through the somewhat counterintuitive selection of so many disparate materials, but then somehow make connections that enable you to orient yourself to reality? Because it seems like the main difficulty at the moment is to orient ourselves—collectively—to a potential reality through some kind of aesthetic involvement in the world.

Sin: I think this goes back to the act of storytelling, or the importance of fantasy. To play and be imaginative is incredibly important. I think it was Walidah Imarishah and Adrienne Maree Brown who said, you have to be able to imagine something in order to move towards it. I think about that a lot, but I also think about the fact that Octavia Butler literally predicted in the eighties a president who would come to power in kind of a puppet government run by an oligarchy with the slogan, "Help Us Make America Great Again." And set in 2025, you know?

Rail: Yeah, that one was on the money. J. G. Ballard's *Hello America* is sort of astonishing in that regard as well, but Ballard places the unhinged president in Las Vegas rather than Florida. But it's like, whoa.



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Sin: We are also living in George Orwell's 1984.

Rail: It's that meme of the Venn diagram of all the dystopias at once! It's like, oh God, they all got a piece of it right! But you're offering something a little different, which is very welcome. There's a sort of lightness to it, even though it doesn't necessarily go well for the characters in the story—no spoilers. There's a light touch on some serious material.

Sin: I think the characters are wrestling with themselves and each other throughout the work, trying to figure out whether they're awake or dreaming or whose reality they're in. And, you know, I think that's what it feels like right now.

Rail: It's an astonishing scene where it sort of glitches on what the life event is. Is it a graduation? Is it a wedding? Is it a death? And we're not sure. There's a way that we get a structural approach to narrative, where each one's on top of the other.

Sin: It's kind of asking, what is the narrative?

Rail: So, a recurring word when you sort of talk about your work is the word binary. And I just want to unpack that a little bit. What role does that play in conceptualizing these things?

Sin: I think that a lot of the binaries are almost synonyms for the same thing—reality and fantasy, performance and authenticity, waking and dreaming, objective and subjective knowledge. I think these things are intrinsically linked. One story I often come back to, and which has really informed the way I think about binaries, is an allegory from the inner chapters of the *Zhuangzi*, the dream of the butterfly. It's the story of a philosopher who falls asleep and has a dream that he's a butterfly. And the dream is so vivid that when he wakes up, he's no longer sure if he's a man dreaming he's a butterfly or a butterfly dreaming he's a man. And I think that this is a beautiful illustration of how multiple things can be true at once.

Rail: I'm someone who forgets dreams very quickly on waking. If I don't make a note immediately, it's gone immediately. I sometimes wonder if, actually I didn't forget, and this is the dream. So the forgetting is the dream, and I'm in it. It's kind of a version of the same parable.

Sin: There's an incredible essay that Barbara Fornssler wrote about the sex-gender matrix that we exist in. But, yeah, I think I'm continually trying to wake up from the dream. But it's hard to see the thing when you're inside of it—like with my work. I'm trying to almost uncover the layers and layers of cultural conditioning and socialization.

Rail: I think that's the looming dream. It's like, something is ending here. So what becomes of art when there isn't the same relation to the future?

Sin: Yeah, this is ultimately a dream we will wake up from.

Rail: I think that's something this work does so elegantly, but in ways that are incredibly depressing to think about—that a certain kind of temporality doesn't exist anymore. It's not conceivable. But I gotta pause—the sex-gender binary is itself already a binary, and maybe one that doesn't work. Maybe those things are not opposable, or are collapsible, or two terms when we need five.

Sin: It's a false binary, like so many binaries, and the fact that we have been conditioned to believe in this false dichotomy and this polarization—I think the sex-gender matrix is another prison for our minds. And I don't know if I've woken up yet, but I'm certainly trying to.

Rail: I don't know, would one want to wake up? Dreams can be good places too.

Sin: Definitely. I guess I'm hoping to reach the kind of conscious dreaming where I can decide the course of the dream.

Rail: They call that lucid dreaming. I'm wondering what the opposite would be? The root of "lucid" is light, so would the other direction be dark-dreaming?

Sin: I think we're currently descending further into the nightmare. Like I said, Octavia Butler was asking, what if things don't change? That's the world that we're in now.

Rail: And she was not the most pessimistic of the science fiction writers of that era either.

Sin: She was hopeful. She believed in the power of storytelling. There was another note card in her archive that always sticks with me: make people touch and taste and know. Make people feel! She wanted to change people.

Rail: It seems we're in more of a Philip K. Dick kind of universe, which is sort of psychotic, delusional, and authoritarian. Yeah—good times. [*Laughter*] The thing about binaries in this work is there always seem to be multiple sets at the same time, such that we're not playing on one. There's several that play on each other.

Sin: It's kind of everything and nothing. Taoism has also influenced my thinking about binaries—that there is no such thing. Language comes into this as well. Every kind of opinion or position or name is just a temporary lodging place in the flow of things that is constantly changing and transforming. So in a sense, any attempt to categorize is an attempt to hold something still that is not—and never can be—still.

Rail: You give a very distinctive and original palette of materials to that thought, that's really striking to bring those things together.

Sin: Thank you.



Sin Wai Kin, *The Time of Our Lives*, 2024. Initiated by Accelerator and co-produced with Kunsthall Trondheim, Canal Projects, and Blindspot Gallery, supported by Vince Guo. Courtesy the artist.

Rail: I want to go back to the research part of your process. Is there a particular way you seek out materials?

Sin: There's usually something that triggers an interest in a particular thing. It often happens kind of iteratively. I might have a new set of characters in a work thinking about a particular thing and/or a new character that's introduced who is thinking about an area of research. And there's not ever an answer to the question. There's only ever more, maybe even better questions. And so I often kind of follow that direction.

I had this article from a scientific journal on quantum entanglement, and I was just so enraptured by the ways that it reflected my thinking about objectivity and truth. The universe is not deterministic. The universe is fundamentally unknowable. But there was a point in history, during the Enlightenment, when we thought not only that we were the center of the universe, but that we would eventually be able to know everything, and then be able to predict the future. I think some people are still living in that narrative.

Rail: I guess we never really recovered from where physics went in the early twentieth century. The rabbit hole just got deeper. From the Copenhagen interpretation on it's like: oh, okay. Unless you have a practice that stabilizes temporarily some piece of the world, that's all there is. And then those stabilized pieces never quite align properly anyway, so you have, at best, temporary holding patterns in the flow.

Sin: The only constant that exists, actually, is change. I have a character called Change that I created to try to embody, to know in an embodied sense that change is the only constant.

Rail: How soon does a character show up in the creative process? Does it start with a character and then you sort of figure out that character's theme, or the other way around?

Sin: It happens in different ways. For example, Change was a drawing that I did that I held on to for a long time, knowing that it would be important, but I just hadn't figured it out yet. At the same time, I was doing a lot of reading and scripting and it came together at some point. There's no set formula for how and when characters appear or manifest in a work.

Rail: The characters seem to embody questions or concepts rather than personalities.

Sin: I think that's true, the characters' personalities also change in different works. Before this year, the character I was working with the most was The Storyteller, and that character would completely change from one work to another. There's a work called *Dreaming the End* (2023), where The Storyteller appears as this kind of authoritative figure in this internal world, saying everything and saying nothing, just repeating the word "name" over and over again, pretending to be making sense, and the character Change is kind of eating a meal across from them, trying to grasp what they're saying. Then later there's an alternate external world, a fantastical garden that the characters reappear in looking and acting completely different. Within that world, you have the character of The Storyteller being born. You witness them being born and starting to use language for the first time, locating themself in language as they start to use it, as they start to use names, and becomes themself within—

Rail: Like an origin story for your universe?

Sin: There are a few origin stories.

Rail: Of course, we can have more than one.

Sin: There's another work featuring Change and The Storyteller, which includes six news presenters broadcasting from parallel universes. Each character appears three times in completely different guises with totally different personalities. And this is also to think about the fact that we are a reflection of the context that we exist in, just as language is a reflection of the context it's produced in and so reproduces again. And with that understanding you can say, there's no such thing as an individual. Individual and context is another binary I'm thinking about in my work. And it can definitely be collapsed: we are our context. Every tool we have to express ourselves reproduces the narratives we exist in, but I also believe that there is agency there in the process of becoming conscious of that.

<u>McKenzie Wark</u> is the author, among other things, of *Reverse Cowgirl* (Semiotexte), *Raving* (Duke) and *Love and Money*, *Sex and Death* (Verso). She teaches at the New School in New York City.



L. Can a World Contain the World?

Language shapes reality, this much we know is time. On a good day, it can be a mechanical of laws or mutual reagonition - bould as Kathyri Yusoff writes in A Billion Black Anthrepoceness or None (2018), earning in sixe a Towering work, in an enclosure, and princing down. The logic of language follows the logic of capitalism and colonialism. Mild meening aproxima in the hard edges of what's signified, what cannot be utfered may as well not easi. If time pla more informating, then, be pash language to 80 femiles. What alternative ways of bring with the world emerge when no language is felf to load?

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Sik Wal Sin (1991, Toronto) levis and works in London. Drawful on experience of existing between binary categories, Siris work reatives sitematis worlds to describe levis depretirence of desire, identification, and comecourages. Recent sole exhibition include. Fondations Marrimo, Rome, Soft Opening, London include. Fondations Marrimo, Rome, Soft Opening, London Bindspot Callery, Hong Kong, Museum of Contemporary Art Zagreb. Soft-bely's SQL, London, and Tappal Contemporary Art Zagreb. Soft-bely SQL, London, et al. Tappal software all Candent Landon-CAD – Carrer differ Contemporary Generics. The Supprise Candent Landon-CAD – Carrer differ Contemporary Generics (1982, London-CAD) – Carrer differ Contemporary (1982, London-CAD) – Carrer differ Car

Alice Bucknell is an artist and writer based in Los Angeles Working with game engines and speculative factor, the practice examines interconnections of architecture, ecology, language magic, and nonhuman and machine intelligence. They are the comparises of five Meetins and franch working as 813—819.

Up Next

Artist Sin Wai Kin on the Power of Transformation

We spoke with Sin Wai Kin for "Up Next," our series spotlighting art world talents on the verge of superstardom.

by Katie White • April 23, 2024 •



Sin Wai Kin, The Construct (film still) (2023). Single-channel video, 4K, colour @ the artist. Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London.

"Storytelling not only represents but creates reality," said artist Sin Wai Kin on a video call from their London studio late last fall. The Toronto-born artist had recently opened "Portraits" at Soft Opening's Minerva Street gallery, an exhibition of five moving-image film portraits of characters inspired by Cantonese and Peking Opera—The Universe, Change, Wai King (masculinity), The Construct (good and evil) and The Storyteller (the exhibition closed in December 2023).

Playing on screens displayed throughout the gallery—and set against floor-to-ceiling white velvet curtains—the characters occupied nearly life-size dimensions. In keeping with the artist's decade-long practice, Sin appeared in all of these guises, transforming their appearance with elaborate make-up, costuming, and staging (the artist works with a team, often including a makeup artist, to create these works). The artist has, over the past decade, emerged as a singular creative force in the art world, with narrative films and performances that center on a revolving cast of archetypal characters and mix together drag aesthetics, classical theater, and science fiction.

"My characters exist in multiple lives, emerging in different projects, in relationship to each other to put different ideas or concepts in relationship to each other. Together, they create a series of interacting relationships," they said. For Sin, the characters have become a vehicle for imagining new, and fantastical, ways of living. "Each of the characters is a kind of embodied speculative fiction, a way to think through issues I'm grappling with. We embody narratives and these characters offer alternative storylines than what we are familiar with" Sin said. "As a transgender person, I'm always trying to find myself in the binary of masculinity and femininity."



Sin Wai Kin, The Universe (film still) (2023), Single-channel video, 4K, color @ the artist Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London.

In the early 2010s, Sin (who relocated to London from Toronto after high school) became familiar with female drag performers such as Holestar and Amanda Lepore. Considering the possibilities of drag as a queer lens for femininity, in 2013, Sin began to perform as their first character, Victoria Sin, in clubs throughout London. Victoria Sin, with big platinum blonde hair and an over-the-top hourglass figure, was an exaggerated stage persona, a caricature of the voluptuous sexuality of Hollywood's leading ladies—but with an acerbic, winking lilt. Performing a series of decidedly "feminine" actions, Victoria Sin's character teetered on parody—while pointing back to the often unreasonable and oppressive expectations expected of women by society.

Over the years, Sin developed other characters who added new dimensions to their films and performances. Working within the intersection of gender, technology, and speculative fiction, the artist is defining a meaningful, new visual language for the ways history is told and imagined. Such interdisciplinary projects have earned them critical and institutional support. In 2022, the artist was shortlisted for the Turner Prize and their works have been shown in institutions including Tai Kwun Contemporary, Hong Kong (2023), the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (2022); The British Museum, London (2022); Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2019); and Tate Modern, London (2017). This year, the artist will participate in a flurry of exhibitions. Currently, the artist is the subject of exhibitions at Mudam (Luxembourg City, Luxembourg) and the Buffalo AKG Art Museum (Buffalo, NY), and has upcoming exhibitions at Cement Fondu (Sydney, Australia) and Accelerator (Stockholm, Sweden), among others.



Sin Wai Kin, Wai King (film still) (2023). Single-channel video, 4K, colour @ the artist Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London.

For Sin, the Soft Opening show was a moment to reflect on their oeuvre to date. "This project was a chance to sit still with my characters," they said. "In making these works I was thinking a lot about image production. Images can tell stories."

Storytelling, and how stories shape our realities, fascinates Sin. Science fiction books, in particular, have shaped the way they create their works. "Authors like Octavia Butler and Ursula K. Le Guin use science fiction not only to create a sense of escapism from the current social order and sociopolitical kind of context, but also to imagine how the world could be if it were different—not only what the possibilities are and what the 'what-ifs' are, but what it would feel to live in those worlds. I think that imagination gives people—gave me definitely—a perspective to look back on my everyday life with and see things differently," Sin reflected.



Sin Wai Kin, Change (film still) (2023). Courtesy of the artist and Soft Opening, London.

In these works, Sin grapples with ways to engage narrative through nearly still imagery. Each of the works in "Portraits" references a famous art work from history. *The Construct*, for instance, is a play on Man Ray's famous photograph *Kiki with African Mask* (1926), which pictures Kiki de Montparnasse resting her head alongside an African mask. "*The Construct* is a character that I usually present as two different people together, facing each other in order to think about a binary of good and evil or victim and villain in the context of femininity," said Sin. "Here, with Man Ray's image of the mask, there is the question of the exotic other. This tension might make us wonder how we may unwittingly be the villain in another person's narrative."

Other works reference Caravaggio's *Narcissus* (1597–1599), Frida Kahlo's *Self-Portrait with Cropped Hair* (1940); and Lu Zhi's *Chuang Tzu Dreaming of a Butterfly* (Ming Dynasty). The portrait *Storyteller*, which pictures a newscaster at their desk, is an reinterpretation of the *Mona Lisa*.



Sin Wai Kin, *The Storyteller* (film still) (2023). Single-channel video, 4K, color @ the artist Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London.

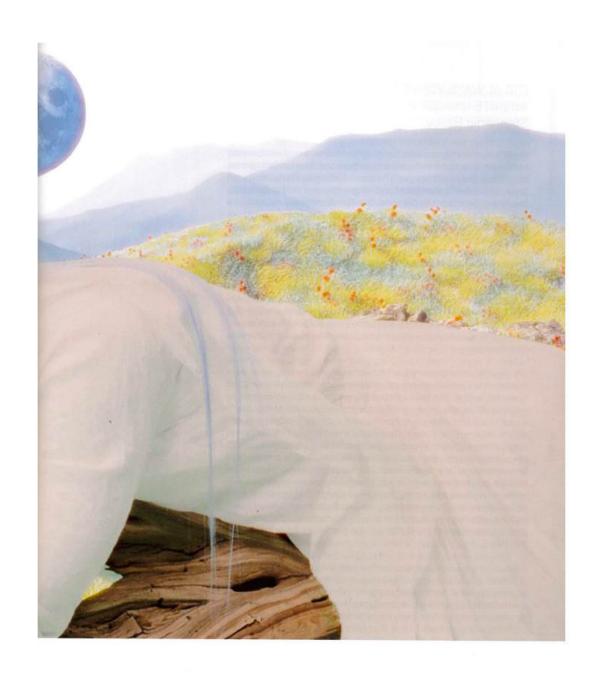
"There's controversy that the Mona Lisa might be a man dressed as a woman. It's part of the ambiguity that surrounds her. I wanted to think about the character of a storyteller and ask questions of the storyteller's intent or the importance of a storyteller's intent," Sin said. "Here the storyteller appears as a news presenter. A news presenter is a modern storyteller. It's someone who is given license to tell something as the truth. But the reality is everybody has an individual idea or experience of truth and these stories are manipulated or have motivations behind them."

For Sin, positioning these characters within art historical imagery is a way to open up the images to fresh interpretation, and to allow for a reconsideration of our histories more broadly. Ultimately, though, all of these works are rooted in intimate realities.

"In the end, we can call these self-portraits. I'm every character. I'm performing every character, but even in the conception of each character—while I am thinking about universal themes—it all emerges from extremely personal experiences," said Sin, "From these individual experiences, we can discover moments of transformation. The more personal the work is, the more it becomes universal."



ARTISTS



Sin Wai Kin

It's Always You: Sin Wai Kin's Infinite Universe Stephanie Bailey

IT'S ALWAYS YOU: SIN WAI KIN'S INFINITE UNIVERSE Stephanie Bailey

In 2021, Victoria Sin became Sin Wai Kin, an evolution that occurred in tandem with the artist's departure from the drag performances for which they had become known. Narrative Reflections on Looking (2016-17), a series of four single-channel videos featuring the hyper-femme drag persona that Sin developed in London's queer club scene, exemplifies what preceded this transition. Embodying the exaggerated glamour of a mid-century Technicolor Hollywood pin-up, the artist poses in theatrical settings as the camera explores their body, which in Preface/Looking Without Touching (2017) lies on red silk wearing red lingerie, faux fur and thigh-high boots. Across these videos, Sin's voice-over teases identity as a negotiation between internal and external experiences and projections. In Part One/She Was More Than the Sum of My Parts (2016), they talk about trying to connect with a magazine image of a woman who looks like them. Then, in Part Three/Cthulhu Through the Looking Glass (2017), they describe placing that image on their face.

Sin has described Narrative Reflections on Looking as a confrontation with idealised images of Western femininity that enabled the artist to redefine their relationship to them. 'Within an image-based culture, the images we are bombarded with every day—which represent and reify cultural constructs like gender—prevent us from seeing past pre-existing categories,' they told artist Himali Singh Soin in 2019, in a conversation reflecting on the way ideals are configured into sociocultural constructs.¹ 'Drag is a safe place for me to act on my desire and take pleasure in embodying things that the culture I'm present in has always told me I want to be, while at the same time presenting them as a fallacy.¹² Engaging drag as a speculative practice intersecting science fiction and fantasy, these ideas expanded significantly in the single-channel video A Dream of a Wholeness in Parts (2020–21), the first work Sin produced as Wai Kin.

Featuring new characters performed entirely by the artist, A Dream of a Wholeness in Parts opens up a universe where ideas of transformation continuously upend limited constructions of being – a theme that Sin has since developed in subsequent works, each one connecting back to ideas the artist expressed in this trajectory-defining composition. In the first scene, two figures sit across a table. They are styled identically in a white pant suit and dramatic chopines, with a blazer buttoned at the belly framing bare synthetic breasts as silver chains cascade down their intermammary clefts from a choker.³ Long black hair cut into a blunt fringe, terraces around each jaw: a wig of Sin's hair, which is also shown alongside the film as the sculpture Costume for Dreaming (2021). Both their lips are black-lined beyond the mouth's edges and gradate into a rich crimson fill – a call-back to Sin's early drag.

The two characters are in fact different versions of the same persona, The Construct. What distinguishes them are their theatrical visages, painted in the style of leading female roles known as Daan in Chinese opera, with colours signifying specific traits. The Construct sitting on the left has eyebrows that slant up

Previous spread:
Portraits — Film still from Sin Wai Kin,
The Universe, 2023 © the artist.
Image courtesy of the artist and Soft

in a dramaturgical display of concern, with a blue wash around the eyes forming sculptural edges along the nose before fading into pink cheeks, signifying bravery and loyalty. Their alterego on the right wears green and yellow contouring to create the menacing glare of a femme fatale, symbolising irascibility and cruelty. They play a chess game, which mirrors their embodied division – a blackand-white competition whose zero-sum showdown is amplified by an artwork hung above each figure. On the left is Botticelli's

The Birth of Venus (1482–85). On the right is a black-and-white photo from Keizo Motoda's Don't try (2015), of a smoking Teddy Boy in a leather jacket staring into the camera. ('Look at his gear gleaming...' Motoda wrote about the image: 'He's got the punch

Afterall, 2024

to pitch a fight . . . ')

on how you look at it.

It's a classic story, the battle of opposites. Here, it takes place between what Sin describes as 'two parts of an internalised false dichotomy', which connects to one of the core influences that shaped the film's composition: Ursula K. Le Guin's Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction.⁵ Outlined in a 1986 essay, the author 'expounds the value of narratives that hold many perspectives, and even opposing ideas together, rather than stories that create binaries of good and evil, true and false, and hero and villain', Sin has explained, describing Le Guin's theory as 'a model of non-binary form of storytelling'.⁶ That model is reflected in the seven interwoven dreams composing A Dream of a Wholeness

in Parts: a collapse of linearity felt most acutely in the visions of The Universe, the film's second character – or third, depending

Dressed in a white vest and black trousers, with a white faux-fur pelt slung over their shoulder like a modern-day Hercules, The Universe is styled after the Zing role in Chinese opera: a masculine warrior who can appear as a hero, general, god, or even a villain or demon. Also known as hualian or faamin — 花脸 'painted face' or 'flower face' — the Zing role's defining qualities are expressed through painted facial motifs. In A Dream of a Wholeness in Parts, The Universe wears a sky-blue wig cut into curtains that frame a face painted like a stylised landscape, with a red lotus flower growing up the nose's bridge to bloom at the forehead. As he dreams, 'he finds himself strangely reflected in his surroundings: a tree and a bowl of wonton noodles are animated to speak back to him, and sometimes to speak as him', Sin explained in 2021.7 'Through blurring and reflections, I wanted to break down the binary of subject and object, individual and context.'8

This binary breakdown reflects the philosophical equation structuring the film: the Butterfly Dream allegory attributed to fourth-century B.C.E. Daoist philosopher Zhuangzi. In the story, Zhuangzi dreams he is a butterfly, and awakens to wonder if he is a butterfly dreaming of being a man. That speculation has ignited numerous interpretations, which philosopher Christine Abigail L. Tan organises into egoistic and monistic theses. The former sees the philosopher Zhuangzi and the dreamer Chuang Chou as the same person, and the butterfly as a product of their imagination. The second rejects the idea of duality and sees Zhuangzi as distinct from Chuang Chou, who is distinct from the butterfly, such that each represents a unique reality. In keeping with the carrier bag model, every possibility is at play in A Dream of Wholeness in Parts. From the opening shot when the camera mimics the perspective of an

eye stirring from slumber or awakening into a dream, to a scene where The Universe stands on a rocky shore, Venus-like, wearing The Construct's wig, corset, and chopines.

Of the egoistic thesis, scholar Zhihua Yao's interdisciplinary approach is the most compelling, given the dramatisation of the self's internal division in A Dream of Wholeness in Parts, whether in terms of The Construct's split or in The Construct's relation to The Universe. Through a Jungian reading of the butterfly as the dreaming or subconscious self, and Chuang Chou as the waking state's ego, 'o Yao sees both selves as inhabiting 'their own territories', which 'is what Zhuangzi means by fen 分 or division' – that is, 'not a division among things, but between selves'. '' Within this division, each self tries 'to expand its territory by projecting or objectifying its counterpart', which Yao defines as 'self-alienation'. '2'

Self-alienation is certainly one way to read the chess game Sin's film opens with. Not to mention a later moment when The Universe, wearing a butterfly-embellished diamante necklace and diamante belt with the letters 'R, E, A, L', tells a talking tree: 'I am not a character in your dream. You are a character in mine, reflecting myself back at me in every embodiment.' As a foil to The Construct's externalisation of the self's internal split, The Universe invokes another theory of division that stands both in contrast and in relation to it, in keeping with the Carrier Bag model: whereby the Lacanian ego – what philosopher Adrian Johnston defines as 'a libidinally invested and relified entity' – faces the 'kinetic negativity' of its unconscious, which defies 'capture by and within ego-level identificatory constructs.' That face-off is likewise reflected in the Butterfly Dream's equation, where the kinetic negativity of the unconscious butterfly challenges the ego's sense of identity.

But, as Tan writes, while Yao's self-alienation interpretation is plausible, Zhuangzi's allegory was never about the self alone. ¹⁴ This is because 'Daoism in general, and especially Zhuangzi, dealt mostly with problems in metaphysics', Tan continues, pointing to Zhuangzi's dream reflection of the Great Sage, which raises the Butterfly Dream allegory 'to a more metaphysical level, encompassing a wider horizon than the self'. ¹⁵ In the text, Zhuangzi asserts that a dreaming person knows they are dreaming only when they awake, and concludes that 'someday, there will be a great awakening when we know that this is all a great dream'. ¹⁶

This idea that everything is a great dream from which there might be a collective awakening, can be brought close to the carrier bag theory of fiction, insofar as it would follow that everyone and everything is engaged in their own reveries - a mesh of conscious and subconscious experiences that meld into narratives that intersect with all others within and around them. This everexpanding field of dynamic relationality defines both A Dream of a Wholeness in Parts and its growing interrelations with works by Sin that have followed, where, as the artist has noted, the relationship between the characters are 'just as important as the characters themselves', because 'that's what a universe is ... a really complicated mesh of relationships'.17 Scholar Kuang-Ming Wu's reading of the Butterfly Dream, which Tan presents as a monistic thesis, aligns with this condition of enmeshment. Engaging the concept of pluralistic monism, Wu considers each dream 'a world in itself' - 'interconnected though mutually exclusive" - that 'can

be construed from many perspectives' and that 'uniquely regulates our many notions into a unity'.¹⁹

Afterall, 2024

In short, each world is a unity that forms part of a collective of unities that combine to constitute a unity as a whole. Within this framework, Wu writes, 'unique' is 'plural' and 'the one is many', just as the idea of 'the "one" is not idealistic, nor is the "many" simply conceptual', but also 'concrete' and 'situational'. Sin's two-channel video installation It's Always You (2021) alludes to this paradoxically singular network of multiplicities. Filmed in a chroma key green studio, a music video shows Sin performing each archetypal role in a four-member boyband: The Universe (the pretty boy), The Storyteller (the serious one), The One (the childish one) and Wai King (the heartthrob). 'I thought I was alone, but then you showed me,' the band intones with one voice, in a poetic abstraction of a love song performed to the sound of a beating heart: 'Together, we're the one, and as one I'm many.'

The universe is a multiverse and vice versa – a speculative condition predicated on acknowledging the possibilities of the unknown, which Chuang Chou demonstrates by awakening to question his very existence. While such ideas seem contradictory, Tan notes, 'it is perfectly logical from a Daoist perspective in that one can be and not be at the very same time', 21 just like the butterfly in Chuang Chou's dream, which may or may not be real. Sin expresses this simultaneity across their films, where assertions are negated, countered or reversed continuously in a constant and unending cycle of mediation. Take the single-channel video *Today's Top Stories* (2020), where The Storyteller, a suited, orange-haired intergalactic newscaster with face-paint depicting a red star imploding, reads lines that include 'that's it, that's not', and 'then becoming with, then becoming apart'.

That unceasing oscillation speaks to the critique of desire that It's Always You taps into, with lyrics amplifying a longing for resolution within and without oneself. Boybands and ballads capitalise on this desire, a salve for the agony of alienation, by idealising the completion of an incomplete self with another, which in reality can manifest as submission, possession and even erasure precisely because of the lack of internal resolution - a 'oneness' embodied by The One, whose masculine Jing face is painted over with a female body. A Dream of a Wholeness in Parts points to these conditions in its script that describes 'Each one contained inside itself, an island universe, reaching but never touching. Made from the same thing', then 'formed into differences.' From that 'same thing'. The Universe says, came 'the first dualism of an individual in a context' and a 'mutually exclusive realm of experience'. And since that first dualism, The Universe continues, 'you have been searching. Reaching in, reaching out, and dividing everything around you because you can't stand to be divided as you are.'

Sin's practice upends this toxic condition of separability, where a longing to transcend duality paradoxically manifests in the very impulse to divide. It is a duality that Zhuangzi's Butterfly Dream also seeks to overcome by challenging perspectives on selfhood, as noted in the Great Sage reflection, which points out that what is experienced as a dream 'is made not from inside that world (while we are dreaming) but from outside of it...'.²² Tan summarises this condition as 'an awakening from both reality and dreaming'²³ –

a position embodied by both Chuang Chou, the awakened dreamer whose conscious reflection of a butterfly in flight untethers concrete notions of self, perception and knowledge alike, and Zhuangzi, the philosopher who describes the situation as a whole in order to destabilise the notion that there is a singular reality.

This opening of a third observational position recalls Situationist artist Asger Jorn's theory of triolectics, a challenge to the interpretation of the Hegelian dialectic as thesis-antithesis-synthesis. Jorn criticised the dialectic for producing a 'merciless either-or', ²⁴ a negational tendency that he also found in Niels Bohr's complementarity theory. Responding to wave-particle duality, Bohr observed that 'the wave-particle aspects of matter' are 'complementary and mutually exclusive', since 'an atomic entity cannot exhibit both its particle and its wave properties simultaneously'. ²⁵ But while Jorn accepted complementarity's recognition of 'the simultaneous presence of several complementary or mutually incompatible but equally valid philosophical systems, principles or tendencies', ²⁶ he challenged its failure to overcome duality itself – what he described as 'arbitrary antagonisms' in relation to philosopher Stéphane Lupasco's own theory that 'all energetic movement implies an antagonistic event...' ²⁸

Thus, while Jorn understood movement in Bohr's complementarity as 'the instrument with which one ascertains positions', and positions as 'the instrument with which one ascertains movement',29 he pointed out a key problem: 'To move or change something, one must have the Archimedean point outside of that which is to be moved.'30 Jorn's triolectic schemata of object-instrument-observer, which he diagrammed by devising the brilliant game of three-sided football, made room for that untethered third position, which is unfixed by the structuring dualities of the status quo insofar as it rejects the defining logic of antagonism baked into binary constructions – ultimately producing something akin to thirdspace; what Edward Soja described as 'a limitless composition of lifeworlds that are radically open and openly radicalisable' yet 'never completely knowable...'⁵¹

Sin's work is adept at opening up an open-ended observational point that heralds such a thirdspace. Take the single-channel video Irreconcilable Differences (2020), which shows two characters, 'The Clowns', standing side by side. Each face is painted with the white mask of Chinese opera's clown character. Both are dressed in white with white wigs. Each is styled after a cultural archetype: a caricatured cross between Marylin Monroe and Jessica Rabbit on one side, and a Tang-era noblewoman on the other. Appearing like a Rorschach test - irregularly symmetrical - they speak in gibberish, in a conversation that veers from politely passive aggressive to painfully antagonistic. Sin has described these figures as two sides of an internalised false dichotomy, like The Construct, and reflections of the binary of self and other - of 'an individual who sees themselves reflected in the other person'.32 Together, they perform a 'dialectic between the characters . . . of always trying to find themselves but failing, and then finding themselves back at the same place, trapped in this body, trapped in this world."33

Irreconcilable Differences enacts that dialectical trap when the Tang character walks off to leave 'Marylin' in the frame. But while a negation appears to have occurred, the viewer and Sin themselves remain, embodying states of presence and non-presence alike

within the composition. This simultaneous positionality aligns with Zhuangzi's place in the Butterfly's Dream as the third observational point where either/or is replaced with all-at-once. As Tan points out, while singular in their existence, the butterfly and Chuang Chou are 'united in Zhuangzi the narrator, in the same way that the Dao, though unknowable in its totality, is manifested in singularities as a never-ending process of becoming'. In keeping, the artist and viewer in Irreconcilable Differences are both present and distant in their position as integral and external to the work, where the trinary collapses into one as much as it opens out to three.

In this sense, *Irreconcilable Differences* aligns with the perspectivism that Tan and Wu identify in Zhuangzi's writings, where the awakened subject 'is anything but an ideal observer severed from the world', but a part of it.³⁵ It is from within this perspectival space that distinct identities hold as much as they overlap, intersect, interact and augment one another through their oscillating collapse into a concrete, situational and conceptual unity of one and many; where positions are viewed from within, between and beyond self and other.³⁶ As Zhuangzi put it, this is 'the center of the circle' – the 'still-point of the Tao', where 'there is no more separation between "this" and "that"', and one can see 'the infinite in all things' and 'the light beyond right and wrong'. Zhuangzi's dream allegories conjure that still-point, illuminating 'a structure of presence' that reveals 'the paradox of the absolute unity but also the absolute singularity of all things',³⁷

It is this paradoxical state that Zhuangzi diagrams in the Butterfly Dream, through which the 'radical interchanges of identities among things, including [one's own]' can be observed, 38 thus introducing what Wu defines as a 'participatory kind of knowledge and of being'. 39 In that participatory state, Tan continues, the 'roaming and soaring of the subject makes the radical equalizing of things possible, and what unites them, in their very singularity'. 40 That roaming and soaring subject, which can be located in all three positions within the Butterfly Dream, is what Sin performs across their cinematic multiverse, through the embodiment of multiplicities that inevitably collapse into the figure of the artist themselves.

Take The Breaking Story (2022), which expands Today's Top Story by introducing six newsreader frames, each containing a variation on two characters: The Storyteller and Change, whose blue face is painted with a butterfly's red wings and brown eyes for markings. 'This just in,' reads one Change: 'we can identify multiple credible identities in the body of one performer.' Given Sin's description of 'authenticity [as] a rehearsed performance',41 the idea of a performer containing multitudes extends to the notion of selfhood as a performance of multiple and evolving roles. Drawing these ideas into concepts of collective identity, what Zhuangzi might call the great dream, is The Storyteller, who reads a line about scientists questioning 'whether a single objective reality shared by all observers exists at all', concluding that 'The answer seems to be no, until we start talking to each other.' All of which feeds into Sin's position that reality is constructed by consensus: a story that 'is repeated so much that it has become a system'.

Unravelling these systemic narratives, or becoming untethered from the idea that they are unchanging and absolute, frees the body from the categorisations that Sin has long sought to transcend. As they

pointed out, 'humans have constructed identities through language in order to try to understand them as static and clearly delineated, when in fact they are not. 142 They are also 'the only animal that completely constructs the environment that our brains are shaped and grown in, so what is natural or authentic is something that is a historical and social result. 143 This sociohistorical conditioning manifests as 'storytelling', the 'thing we use to understand our relationship to our bodies and our bodies' relationship to the world'. And 'somewhere within the tension between those two relationships,' Sin points out, 'an identity is there. 144

Sin's latest film, *Dreaming the End* (2023), visualises that relational tension in an opening scene that calls back to *A Dream of a Wholeness in Parts*. The Storyteller and Change sit across a table from one another in an opulent dining room. By this point, Change's reading of a storybook where the word 'name' stands in for most words, has shifted to the singular repetition of that word by The Storyteller, who is talking – or mansplaining? – at a silent Change. The scene recalls Sin's performance *the story changes the body changes (repeating)* (2022), where the word 'name' is projected repeatedly on The Storyteller's body, in order to visualise the dynamics of identification.

As Sin has pointed out, 'Naming is an act of mastery'45 – a designation that sets a definitive, categorical limit, which connects to a line The Storyteller repeats across Sin's films: 'In the telling, there is a dividing.' Names, like stories, set boundaries – they can even become the grounds for war, which is something Change alludes to in *Dreaming the End*, when they ask The Storyteller if they are 'a good or a bad'. Sin's exploration of 'a non-binary perspective' – 'as a way to contain multitudes in yourself, as a way to challenge the act of naming, as a way to savour the constant transformation of things and really revel in it' – upends this divisive impulse. ⁴⁶ To do this, Sin's works challenge the structuring principles of language and narrative by unfolding the concept of 'the name' itself, which A *Dream of a Wholeness in Parts* describes as 'the guest of a substance' that 'would be the name of everything' if 'it were really the name of something'.

This place beyond language and identification returns to the Taoist still-point described by Zhuangzi as the centre of a circle, shaped by the simultaneous unity and singularity of all things, and where the process of becoming is endless – a position that sounds uncannily like the place where 'ideas, language, even the phrase "each other" doesn't make any sense', which is where Rumi actually ends up after the poet's exhaustively quoted invitation to meet in the field beyond wrongdoing and rightdoing. Only those who have transcended see 'this oneness', Zhuangzi writes, and have 'no use for differences' but dwell 'in the constant.' Sin embodies and disembodies this constant across their characters in order to express these core ideas: 'that there are points in the continuum of reality and fiction that are both real and fictional simultaneously', to quote Change in *The Breaking Story*, and 'We experience moments where the distinction of real or imaginary are eclipsed or transformed in and out of each other.'

A series of new video portraits created by Sin in 2023 express these dynamic conditions. The Storyteller is portrayed as a futurist Mona Lisa in a pink suit and orange hair cut into the style of The Construct, who appears in another video restaging Man Ray's photograph

PAGE 323

Kiki with an African Mask (1926). Change sits in a green-screen studio wearing a sharp suit and holding one lock of their chopped blonde hair in one hand and a butcher's knife in the other, with hair strewn on the floor. The Universe, meanwhile, appears in a Tangera white robe with long blue hair tied into a half knot, sleeping on a tree under a full moon, in an image drawing on depictions of the Butterfly Dream. Then there's Wai King, first introduced in It's Always You. The red-headed heartthrob, the lead in Sin's cosmic boyband, re-enacts Caravaggio's sixteenth-century depiction of Narcissus, the man who fell in love with his reflection when he saw it in a pool, his arms creating a closed circle in the mirroring of the self and its projection.

Afterall, 2024

Wai King's portrait feels like a new opening; an allegorical image folded into an allegorical image that invites overlapping philosophical interrogations into questions of being and perception. As scholar David Houston Wood writes, 'That the gaze in the *Narcissus* inherently redoubles upon itself suggests nothing so much as a relationless anomie. '48 Indeed, for philosopher Louis Marin, 'The originating of a human being is the originating of relations', which means Caravaggio's painting 'lacks precisely such an 'originating" moment. '49 To emphasise this dead-end loop, Wood quotes literary critic A.D. Nuttall's description of Narcissus as the reflection of 'an obstinate truth: self is self'. This absence of relation leaves Narcissus with 'nowhere to go', Nuttall asserts, because 'Even the notion of self-consciousness, insofar as it has real content, demands an artificial splitting of the individual.'00

But, as Wood points out, that Narcissus is a self-portrait of Caravaggio complicates Nuttall's reading. As a self-portrait, the composition does in fact function as an artificial splitting of the self, just as Narcissus is likewise split through the objectification of his reflection. Yet amid this split, which Asger Jorn might have pointed out, there is the observer; whether the figure of Echo described in Ovid's telling, who watches Narcissus at the pool, or the artist who presents the myth to the viewer who perceives the narrative as a whole, thus echoing the triolectical structure of the Butterfly Dream. Caravaggio's Narcissus, then, is not a closed loop, nor is the Butterfly Dream. As with Irreconcilable Differences, what seems to be a representation of a duality is actually an expansive site of negotiation that transcends duality through the paradoxical representation of its divisions - that is, the reflection of the false internalised dichotomy and the binary between self and other, all at once.

This is what makes Sin's new image of Wai King so compelling. Perfectly interpreting its source material, Wai King is Sin Wai Kin performing Caravaggio as Narcissus. In this embodiment of the artist as performer, Sin reflects and refracts themselves in the realm of representation so as 'to explore profound ontological, existential, etiological, and epistemological questions' that 'get beyond superficialities', as art historian Maria H. Loh observed of Caravaggio, whose painting, 'in the final analysis, is about seizing the unruly self and converting it into an estranged object held out for unforgiving scrutiny. The significance of Caravaggio's painting, Loh continues, 'is biographical and practical... historical and theoretical', where 'Caravaggio is inseparably... "the body of his own work", 52 much like Sin, which makes Narcissus an ideal cypher for Wai Kin as Wai King.

Journal of Art. Context and Enguiry

Afterall, 2024

Loh importantly notes that Narcissus was described as the inventor of painting by the fifteenth-century artist Leon Battista Alberti in Della pittura, a book, 'which closed with the open-ended question: "What is painting, but the act of embracing by means of art the surface of the pool?" Citing Arthur Rimbaud's assertion that 'lis another' and that the first exercise of any poet is to know themselves, Loh sees Caravaggio's Narcissus as an exercise in that kind of self-knowing. Caravaggio's 'ambivalent process of self-regard', Loh continues, 'sought to transcend the subjectivity, iniquity, and finitude of individual experience through the immortality and openendedness of art', which 'is what it means to embrace the surface of the pool." Relating their practice to Octavia E. Butler's mantra 'the more personal, the more universal', Sin's practice likewise performs that embrace, in which the artist becomes the canvas: that fluid, reflective, open-ended surface of the pool that Alberti described.

The universe that I am creating with my practice is really meant to act as a mirror', Sin said in 2022, 'in the same way that every character that I'm trying to create is a reflection or a site for people to see themselves.'55 To perform the self as prism and portal is to open it to the possibilities of existence both in and beyond its frame; a reflection through which every one and every thing can be transformed into a prism and portal themselves – a still point at the centre of a circle. As Zhuangzi wrote, 'One can only know things through knowing oneself.'56 It starts and ends with you.

AGE 324

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	35	KM. Wu, The Butterfly as Companion, op. cit., p.176 quoted in C.A.L. Tan 'The Butterfly Dream', op. cit., p.115.
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	37	C.A.L. Tan, 'The Butterfly Dream', op. cit., p.102.
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	39	C.A.L. Tan summarising a concept by Wu discussed in ibid., pp.115–17.
	40	lbid., p.117.
	41	'Sin Wai Kin & Róisin Tapponi', op. c/t.
	42	'Sin Wai Kin', Tate Turner Prize 2022 nominee interview, op. cit.
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Sin Wai Kin, Still from It's Always You, 2021, 4K dual-channel video, 4min 05sec. Courtesy artist and Blindspot Gallery, Hong Kong

A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry

PAGE 328





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PAGE 330



(GE 331





PAGE 332

Top: Sin Wai Kin, *Dreaming the End*, 2023, single-channel video, 21min 06sec. Courtesy artist and Fondazione Memmo,

Bottom: Sin Wai Kin, *The Breaking Story*, 2022, six-channel video, 6min 31sec. Courtesy artist and Blindspot Gallery, Hong Kong



AGE 333

In Conversation



Manifesting alternate realities: Sin Wai Kin and Planningtorock, Barbican 16.11.23

Bin Wai Kin: Thank you for coming. Today we're going to talk about how we use our work to realise worlds that we want to be part of, realise hodies that we want to live in, and realise our future selves before we know who that even is. I want to say thanks to Jam for agreeing to speak with me. Planning toprofix Thank was for.

went to say thanks to Jam for agreeing to speak with new Planning torook: Thank you for institute me. It is so nise to be here.

SWK: Jam's work has been really inspirational to me since I was a young adult, so if is great to be able to share our work in this way new. We're going to structure dosly by sharing some clips of our work that we have both agreed speak to each other, and then we're going to discuss those clips and where we were when we made them, how we feel about them now, and what their relationship is. We're going to go straight into it: the first two clips that we're going to play are Doorawy by Planningtorock, and It's Allways You, my work.

[Doorway by Planningtorock, and

[Doorway by Planningtorock, and It's Always You by Sin Wai Kin]

Pt They're so hot! Oh my god! I love boy

bands so much.

SWK: That's one thing that we spoke about first when we got together and were deciding what the topic of this conversa-

flori was going to be. We were like, yeah, of course, there's a real commonailty in being trans and being norbinary in a world where that's just not the reality. But there is also this secret agenda of making ourselves look hot.

P: Not so secret, though, right?

SWK: But I think that's also part of it, because in a world that can't see your hotness, you have to make it for yourself. I think that is really also why I made a boy hand. Because for so much of my life, people just rould not see masculantly in me at all. It was literally laughable to people when I told them, I actually do see myself as masculine'. So, this was me doing it so much that nobody could say anything anymore.

doing it so musch that nobudy coald say anything anymore. Pt Completely relate to that. For me, Doorway and making the person in Doorway as about me feeling very alone, not seeing myself in the world, and before transitioning also just not even seeing myself and not having myself in the world. Creating the person in Doorway was kind of ... they 're like an angel for me. They're like, 'I'm bere to belp you become yourself, to be who you should be, who you are. Come with me', So, undeniably hot. Also ageless, timeless somehow, almost like a moving statue in that sense. It's quite amazing to see now, because Doorway is over 10 years old, and it still has such a strong impact on me. I'm still so grateful

for that person in that video. I see them and I still find them really beautiful, and they still guide me a lot.

SWK: Yeah, I think there's a lot of parallels in the videos. There are things like, we're both using more and the lact that the track is called Doorraya. I think similarly, B's Always Fow was a little hit of a gasleway for me and my practice and this opening out, not only for my practice but also for myself.

P: Doorung was definitely quite literally a moment where both myself and my mosse understood what making music was for me and its purpose. The lyrics are like, 'I know my leelings under my skin', and I wrote those very quickly, just following the leeling of them. When I was making the clip, I filmed it with a high-speed camera because I wanted it to be dreamy, as slow that it had this underiability somehow.

SWK: I also shoth I's Always Fou in double-litme, which is a music video technique—you're lip-syncing super fast so that you can put everything in slo-mo later—and It has this really drunny quality and effect. But I think that so much of making those charecters was the creation of some kind of intereself. I have a friend who, after watching those works, was like, every one of these

characters is actually just you, in different moments — like, this is you when you're mad at me, this is you when you're frumk! They could see all of these different parts of me, but I had not read that at all into the work. There was something about making that work and making these characters and making the boy hand that was almost like I knew something before, or my work knew something before I knew it. That was before I had started taking bormones or medically transitioning, and I wasn't really sure if that was something that was going was fill the was something and I wasn't really sure if that was something I was going

before I had started taking hormones or mediculty transitioning, and I wasn't really sure if that was something I was going to do at the time, but I knew that what I really wanted to do im my practice was to embody masculinity in this really playful, but also very serious way.

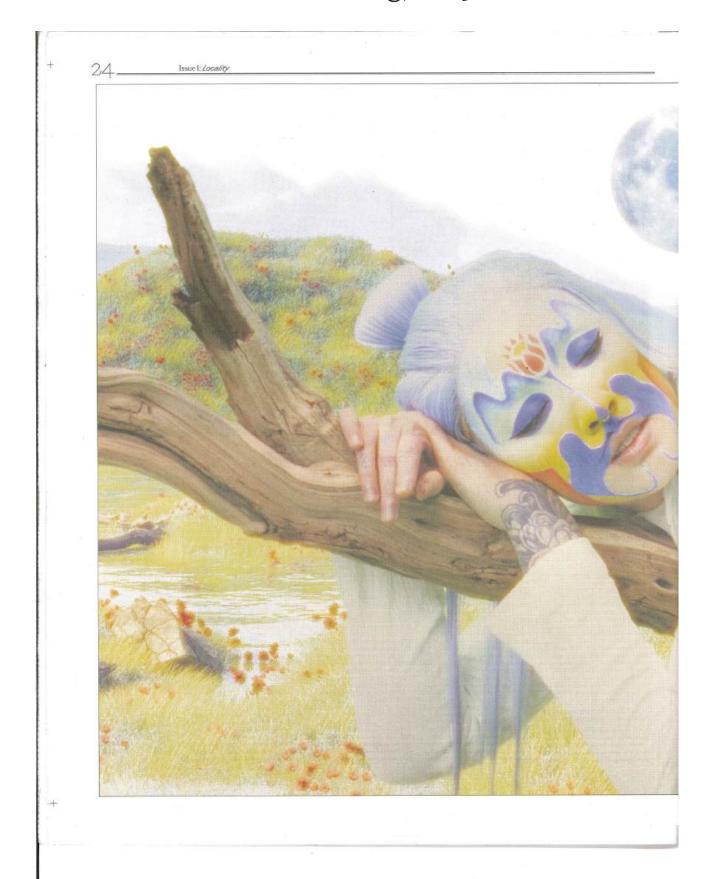
P.I completely relate to that, this thing of your work almost being out before you, and following that example. It's like testing, seeing, creating yourself in front of yourself to bely you go forward, but the playhimess is the best part of it. If I look at the video, I can see some of the prosthetics sticking out a little bit. If was made of theatre putty, and it was every hot and the lights meant It kept melting and slipping, and I was really messy, but I quite like that you see that It's actually made, like because I'm literally moshing, Jam, and that was part of the making.

SWK: Absolutely, I remember shooting It's Always You and that I see bodysuit, which I put on and then I'm just somebody

IMAGE 24

n Wai Kin, It's Always You. 21. Courtesy of the artist and Blindspot Gallery.

The Toe Rag, 2023



The Toe Rag, 2023



Manifesting alternate realities: Sin Wai Kin and Planningtorock, Barbican 16.11.23

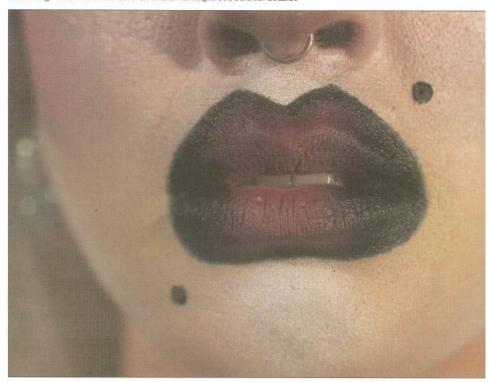


IMAGE 26

else, immediately, but also alter however many takes we did in it. It was just like leaking from inside!

P: Worth it, worth it.

SWK: It is like a grotsequences in the making of the thing and the becoming of it.

P: Totally, almost a silliness. Sometimes it would just silide up and then I'd have putty all over my face, but the end result was epic.

SWK: Yeah, definitely, and it's a totally different experience watching it. The thing I think about drag and costuming and make-up is that it's a lidind of embodied specialtaire faction. It's this play, but it's also serious. It's something that, even if I can't really know something that, even if I can't really know something it my body yet, in some part of my mind I can know that it's something that I want to move towards and in this kind of fantasy space, that it's something that I want to move towards and in this kind of fantasy space,

just go for it.
P: At the time of using the prosthetic I really wanted to explore the gender of my face, so extending the brow was one way

thee, so extending the condition of the condition of the second clips. We're going to play Misograp Drop Dead by Jam [Planningtorock], and my work, fillocutionary Utterances.

all the post-production, and Wai Kin also does the same, so we have these really close relations.

SWK: I don't do all of the post-production, I don't do the CGI for most works. I usually work with VFX artists, a colourist, a sound niker, but yeah, I think for sure that the editing is where you see the work come into itself. I really wanted to talk about language, because that was what really struck me looking at these two clips, pairing them together. It's so weind to with Illocutionary Literances now because it's a little bit older and you know we're talking about your work knowing something before you know if, and I'm looking all if like 'Oh my god, I can hardly watch it'. Illocutionary utrenances are speech acts that do something at the same time as saying something as, for example, if you say I prunise you such and such', or a I describe in the film, say 'It's a girl' or 'It's a boy' when somebody is born, or 'I mose pronounce you man and wife, these are speech acts that are not only saying something but things that are doing at the same time. I think this is really the way that language functions, it's like language carries with it'—especially English—all of the ideologies and the histories of power that it's been shaped with, so I really wanted to think about speech acts and enact my own libourthous pseech act and the mod illustromary speech act and the end of that work.

P. If you're familiar with my work I did an altum called IV, which I'm very proud of, but I found it very frustrating because it left like a lot of people didn't understand

much of what it was about, so I decided to be much more direct, and so tracks like Patriarchy, Oner and Out and Misoggang Drop Dead were part of that. I would love to do a track called Trans Misoggang Drop Dead, but this was over ten years ago and I was still learning about intersectionality. The reaction to that frack was incredible — some people thought I was making fun of a very serious topic, but I gut wanted to be very clear, very direct. I just whought, 'Okay what do I want from patriarchy? I would like it just to lack off? It was really fun to do that, and to use the mouth like that as well — I knew that I wanted to be present in the video, but I didn't want it to be about me, per se. It was a tool from to work that out, how you can make a clipthal's not particularly about a person but that has this really strong presence. I think that for me, both the clips are very connected on that level.

SWK: Delimitely, My work always comes from an extremely personal space informed by personal experience, but one of the cornershouses of my personal the more universal,' which is something that I much of what it was about, so I decided to

of the correststones of my practice is the idea that 'the more personal the more universal,' which is something that I rend on a notecard in Octavia E. Butler's archives at the Huntington Library in LA You have to find ways to abstract your personal experience in your work so that it is something that people can project their own experiences onto.

P. It's quite a challenge, so it feels good if you can find a way to deal with something that is discriminatory and have an opinion on it, but also do something the control of the same property of the sam

time, something playful. I thought it was

time, something playful. I thought it was absolutely hilarious, like 'misogyny drop dead', and so sometimes approaching it from that perspective is a really efficient way to face it.

SWK: With Illocutionary Utterances, I was really struggling to say things that I foll wort true in the context that I was in, and so had this really absurd lip sayne over the top of a more serious voiceover that feels ilke you can tell that the character is trying to say something, but you can't hear. That churacter and that makeup was my first drag character, and it was really about trying to unpick my relationship with Western femininity to try to figure out what had been given to me, what things I had been socialised to want and to say about myself, and what I actually wanted. I think that coming back to the use of language. I want to also talk about pronouns. When I started to use nonbianary pronouns for other people was when I started to really be able to conceive of people that I knew without gender, and that 's how powerful language is.

P: I feel life if the form 'nonbinary'

that's when I knew that that's what I was, and that's how powerful language is. PI I feel like if the term 'nonbinary' had been around twenty years ago it would have been great. It's taken me a long time to get to where I am, and that's also because of language and because of pronouns. I wrote a track called Beyond Blang Blads which was the beginning of my understanding that I had I didn't connect to this notion of binary gender, but then it would take another five years,



belong to you.

P: We talk a lot about grief in our

work, and in that sense saying goodbye to parts of ourselves and letting go, and that being a big part of the work.

authenticity is often just a well-rehearsed performance, a performance you don't realise that ou're doing anymore because it has become automatic

SWK: I think that's a good segue into the last two clips that we're going to play, which are The Breaks by Planning-torock, and an excerpt from my recent film, Dreaming the End.

[The Breaks by Planningtorock, and reaming the End by Sin Wei Kin]

SWK: In both of those clips I think

SWK: In both of those clips I think that there's an acknowledgement of previous selves, and also a recognition of change. Maybe you want to say something about your relationship with the kid who was in the video with you? P: I think Victor represented a sort of a mini-me, a child-me. It was going back and almost holding like the child version of myself. But also, because Victor looked like me now, then, it was almost like. That I offready knew I was trans when I was a child. This video definitely was about that, even though at the time It wasn't as conscious. But this is what his video's purpose and the song was—helping me learn that, and also letting go of all the projected versions of me. When I look back, It's almost like I was made into a character, and I've become less of a character and more myself the older I've got. The people in these clips actually are me becoming more myself, and they're showing me how to be 'me'. I always makes me cry a little bit, The Breaks, because the way I move in it is like I'm really fighting for my life. It feels really emotional.

SWK: It let very emotional to watch.

SWK: If left very emotional to watch it. It's hard to walk around in the world as a trans person. Watching The Breaks

I think yes, I am sensitive! I do break easily. I wrote the birth of a character easily. I wrote the birth of a character into Dreaming the End — the birth of The Storyteller. They hook like I used to look when I presented as more feminine. I wanted to show them being born into the world and really trying to understand who they are with the tools that they were given at that moment and

understand who they are with the tools that they were given at that moment and to have some compassion for myself, as somebody who did what they could with the tools that they were given.

P: It's like a massive self-acknowledgement in that sense. I love that elip. The whole video is a maxing, but I really love the way you do your voice. We be talked a lot about with twe do with our voices and what our voices are for us, and I've worked a lot with pitching my voice back in 2011. Was the first time that I actually met myself. I really beard my voice and I really heard myself — my authorities elf — for the first time, although I don't believe in suthentisety, Just to contradict myself there. It's something that you work with a lot in a really cool way, too.

SWK: Yeah, absolutely, Voice modulation really started coming into my work when I begin working with more masculine characters, and it's something that I do constantly now. When I started making films, I was using the voice that I had at he time, which I was ollen told was a very feminine voice.

started making films, I was using the voice that I had at the time, which I was often lold was a very feminine voice. That was the tool that I had, and I had for use the kind of projections of femininity that came with my voice, to use that loof in service of the meaning of my work. But at a certain point, I realised that II didn't leed right anymore. It's interesting also as somebody whose voice — the pick of my voice — is actually changing also as somebody whose voice — the pick of my voice — is actually changing also as somebody whose voice — the realised that II didn't leed right anymore. It's interesting also me of the vocals are from before my voice Started changing, some of them, are while it's changing, some of them are while it's changing, so while it's changing, so so while it's changing, so while it's changing is made to the pick of the pi vibrations coming from your body, literally. But what I learned when I

started working with a speech therapist started working with a speech therapist was that your voice is as constructed as anything else; where your voice is the in your mother in your most had you throat and your throat and your throat had you learn how to do. Of course, the melody of your voice, whether your voice goes up and down, which they is fermitime voice is do, or whether it is more monotone, which is something that typically men's vuices do, is something that you learn. Also your vocal cords are muscles; if you exercise your muscles to make your voice sit lower, it will affect the pitch of your voice. It's another thing that is socialised, constructed, that is taken for

Pt. Like you say, it's socialised completely why vince has changed quite a lot over the years—learn't sing as high as I used to be able to, and I can sing a do liver.

SWR: Going back to an idea of authenticity and breaking from that, one of the binaries I'm trying to really confront in my practice is the binary of performance and authenticity, and the fact that outhenticity is often just a well-rehearsed performance, a performance you don't realise that you're doing anymore because it has become automatic.

Audience questions:

Question I: Thanki you for sharing your art with us. I heard you say the word 'direct' a lot. You have great faith in its power, I feel. I wonder what you think about exaggeration? On, Howe exaggeration. The all boot expanding, always, maximal rather than minimal.

SWK: I use direct in mwent, as a love.

SWK: I use drag in my work, so I love to exaggerate. Parody and extremes are a to exagerate. Panody and extremes are a great way to hold up a magnifying glass to something, and to really look at it in a less serious way. It invites, as we were talking about, a space of play. But also, when you blow something up, you can really look at it in a different way.

Q1: Does it make it more direct or less direct?

Q12 Does if make it more direct \(\) direct?

P1 If link it can be both. If it's really expanded it can be more wishle, but I think it open shings up as well. That's why I like to use a tot of humour in my staff, even though not everybody knows that it's humour. It's a safe space to falk about things.

oout things. SWK: I think it's a case-by-ca thing. But for me, the exaggerati this pushing of something into a fantasy land, gives me another



When ! look back. it's almost like I was made into a character, and I've become less of a character and more myself the older I've got

IMAGE 27

Planningtorock, The Breaks, 2013. Music video. Courteey of the artist.

and when the term nonbinary came, I was like, 'it's brilliant, I love it!' I'm such a

and when the term noribinary came, I was like, 'I's brilliant, I love it!' I'm such a they'them.

SWK: We were talking about our work being direct or subthe, and I think these works are a lot more direct in their messages than some others, but there's a tension because sometimes you're not really able to be direct because you're just not given the language to describe your experience. I think that's something that I'm still struggling with in my work and use of language.

P: I wonder if that's something to do with the different fields that we opurabe in? Having said that, though, when I mave been more direct, it's interesting who it scares. I remember when I released Doorway there were some people who were like, This is so furny, you look so beatthal, you look so that in it.

SWK: Yeah, it's interesting like when you choose to be more direct or when able to create a different perspective to look back at yourself more clearly with and understand what it is that you want

perspective to look back at an everyday, less exaggerated thing in a new way so that I can pick it apart.

Question 2: There's a really interesting idea that you developed that you can discover or rediscover your identity by making pieces of art. But there's also the paradoxical aspect that when you create a piece of art, you in a sense also they nur identity. Do you think that by creating a piece of art into the your discovering your thindrity. Do you think that by creating a piece of art into the young the stack to this past identity.

identity, your future self will be stack to this past identity?

SWK: I was saying I found if quite difficult to see the second ello of my work because I really see who I was and where I was at that time. As somebody who makes lots of characters and then films them, those works exist forever, hopefully. You're kind of memorialising a person that you were who you won't always be. But I don't know, I think that I just have to live with that. I hope that in the lature I'm something that I can't even imagine now. Pt. I'm transitioning right now and sometimes it's hard to see myself in past videos because if was a difficult time, as I wasn't really aware or in contact with my transitese. You have to brace the fact that your work evolves. So yeah, it's a work in progress, I guess.

Question 3: I feel like there's such a fixed image of what drag is or what drag given the fixed image of what drag is or what drag loss, if I'm wondering how you started and if it was always part of your art, or fit it was separate from your practice before?

SWK: For a long time, drag was not part of my art practices become I was separate from your practice of the was of my art practice before?

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SWK: For a long time, drag was not part of my art practice become I was separate from your practice before?

When I'm a long time, drag was not part of my art practice become I was so aware of how by bringing if it not eit, better opposes it could be testshised or conticised. I wasted until I had a fill mantain greactice where I was able to narrate the experience of looking at these images at the same.

where I was able to narrate the ex-

where I was able to narrule the experience of looking at these images at the same firm as presenting them. That Is when I felt comfortable emough to bring it in. Guestion 4: Do you think that as you become more comfortable in yourself, you'll have less drive to become these fautusy characters, or do you think that will always stay forever?

SWKS I hope one day I'm like, I have reached my infai form, I don't need to do this anymore, I retire! No, no, I don't, actually, I really hope that never hoppens, P: Yeah, I bopo. We still want to be hol. As long as I want to be hol. As long as I want to be hol, there will always be faintably.

IMAGE 28 Sin Wai Kin, Act J Part 3 Ripoutionary Utterances, 2018. Courtesy of the artist and Soft Opening, London.

mountain, there will always be more hot mountains to climb!

Question 5: It hink one of the themes that cames out in your work a lot alongside identity is this idea of multiplicity or circularity, that self and other is also a false binary. When you think about the content of reality, to what extent does community, other people, or interresistionships in the world feed into your practice—like, everything we've seen has looked primarily at the camera looking at yourselves. But I feel like you are talking about more than just personal narratives, SWK: As I mentioned before, I really think the more personal the more universal, and in all seriousness regarding the last question, I think that the work will never be able to unpick all of the ways that we are socialised to create binaries and separate ourselves from the world when actually, the binary of self and other is also, all performance and authenticity, of fantasy and reality, nature and nurture. Humans are the only animals that completely construct the environment in which our brain is shaped and grows, so we will never know the depths to which we are

socialised. I hope to just constantly unpick it until well, I mean, I don't think I'll ever reach the bottom. I think that's an endless

Partition was a service of the project.
P: I made Doorway together with my friend Gigt, who is also trans, and we've been friends for a very long time. We had a really special moment with the exportance of building the prosthetic together, and we were both transitioning. It's defanitely not isolated — if's very much together with friends who totally understand, thank condiness.

Question 6: I was wondering about the way you construct sound, the editing process, and where the sounds come from, like the synth elements.

process, and where the sounds come from, like the synth elements.

SWK: I work on almost all of my soundtracks. For It's Always You, I found a heartbest on YouTube, then I used a mix of electronic instruments on Ableton and sampled the intros to NSYNC songs, which you can hear a little bit, in a kind of spooky way. I work with music producers sometimes, and a sound mixer to refine everything. But I edit almost all my films myself — I think It's a really important part of the artistic process. There's all of the pre-production, and then the actual about. There's a broadening out of the process until you're shooting with a crew of 10 or 20

the beginning, but I still have no idea what it will look and leel like because you can write something down or draw a picture, but to actually have the thing fully realised. It always surprises me.

Question 7: What's next? Do you have any inspirations that you are happy to share with use?

P. I'm working on a new record, which is really fun.

SWK: I am currently working on something that will be finished next year for an exhibition in Stockholm at a space called Accelerator, opining in October. I am scripting a science fiction silcom using the idea that time is not absolute—theories from general relativity and

anistrating a scheduler and absolute — theories from general relativity and quantum entanglement to think about the fact that everybody has their own experience of time, and using that as a metaphor for everybody having individual experiences of reality that coxexist. Question 8: I have a question about the relationship between lip-syncing and temporality. I'm a scholar looking at drag and I have my drag practice foo. In lip sync and in drag, you're sometimes performing dead people's wices and sometimes living people's voices — there's, a sense of 'tagging' the past into the present through the act of lip sync. But then I look at your work and think the act

important for me to also show my work in important for me to also show my work in lots of different confeats because, for example, the way that a work that examines the construction of Western feministiy is going to be received is going to be received is going to be totally different in London than it is in Hong Kong. There's a lot that is an immediately understood about my work in Western contexts, things like Chinese mythologies or philosophy that I'm working with, or references from Cantonese and Peking open, or just a perspective of whiteness and Western narraflyes and values being a construction that is imposed.

It's time to get a drink. I think we're going to go to the martini bart!



people, or sometimes it's also just me. Then afterwards you go book into this dark room and it's just you again, and you're just chipping away at this thing it's like sculpting. You have a general shape and then you refine it and refine it and refine it, until you start seeing the work really become itself. Ioften will record the voicever or the vocals and the start of the control of the contr will record the voiceover or the vocals beforehand and then lip sync to them on set, which is really useful, especially when I'm being two characters in dialogue. I remember somebody lelling me that this was the opposite way that most filmmakers usually work.

P: But when you're making things P: But when you're making things yoursell, you're so dependent on being inspired by the stulf you're making. Also, it's so unpredictable, I don't know how people do it with mond boards. I just istart stuff and then I'm like, oh, that's really interesting, let's follow that. I tried once to do a mood board, and we didn't do mything like that. It was a woste of time. Just because it's so much about just feeling.

SWK: Desnitely. But I do a lot of soryhearding and a lot of scripting, and actually, the work is usually pretty much exactly the way that I laid out at

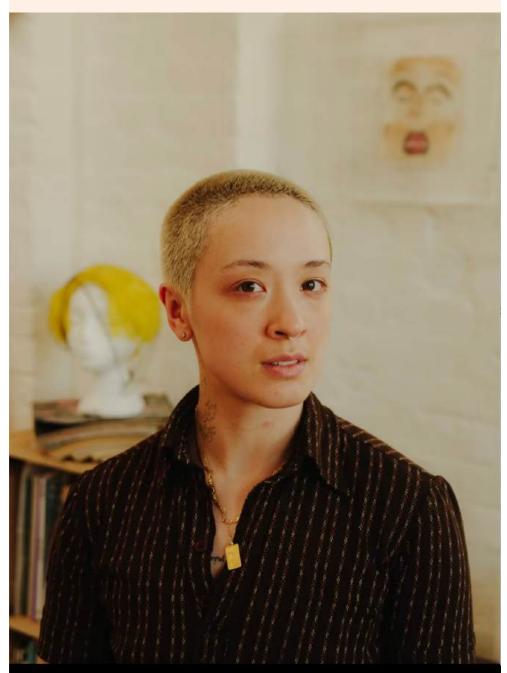
of lip sync to me seems to be invested in a sense of futurity and becoming, and so I was wondering I you had any thoughts about the relationship between lip sync and temporality in your work.

SWR: Yesh, absolutely — I think also just about performance in general and temporality. As you say, often you are embodying voices of people who are dead or just people who are not those people anymore. You're embodying a lime. I think there's melancholy in a lat of drang performances, especially performing ferminimities. But definitely, I think hip syncing is really a technology of embodiment — when you can lip-sync as the voice that is not coming from your body, it seems to people like you have become that voice. Thinking again about voice as a site of authenticity, if you can make if seem like that voice is coming from you, then you can really loop people lind a fasem like that voice is coming from you, then you can really bod people lind a fasem like that voice is coming from you, then you can really bod people lind can fareas that could be from the past or the future. I'm also thinking about Cantonese and Peking Opera, where the door to the stage is called the Ghost Gate, because as you pass through the gates, you become these people who are often long dead, or you embody a sptril. I think it's really

There's a lot that is not immediately understood about my work in Western contexts, things like Chinese mythologies or philosophy that I'm working with.

FINANCIAL TIMES

myFT



© Dan Wilton | Sin Wai Kin photographed at their studio in Vauxhall, London

Collecting (+ Add to myFT)

Artist Sin Wai Kin: 'Drag gave me the tools to separate what I wanted and what other people wanted'

By playing with gender and storytelling, Sin upends how we think about power

Caroline Roux

In 2021, the artist Victoria Sin changed their name. "It really didn't really suit me anymore," says Sin (who uses the pronouns they/them). But this was not always the case. In the 2010s, the artist now known as Sin Wai Kin was building a blazing reputation as what they have described as "a blonde bombastic bombshell". Like a cross between Marilyn Monroe and a scowling drag queen, Sin loaded their slender frame with lashings of fakery from high hair and long eyelashes to heaving latex breasts and padded hips, all vacuum-packed into glittering gowns. Teetering on stripper heels, they would construct a cheese sandwich stage by stage, like a magician performing a trick, over a ridiculous four minutes in front of an audience of late-night club kids, a subcultural rising star.

Now, as a non-binary transgender person and using their Chinese name, the artist has moved beyond the club stage into complex video works where characters float between dream and reality, morphing and blurring as they dissolve society's binary norms. Sin grew up in Canada, but their father is from Hong Kong where it is still convention to have both a western and a Chinese name. "It seems to much better represent my non-binary self," they say. "*Wai* means intelligent and has a feminine ring. *Kin* means creative and is associated with masculinity and heaven."



Stills from 'Dreaming the End' (2023) by Sin Wai Kin





© Courtesy the artist/Fondazione Memmo (2)

In 2021, their video "A Dream of Wholeness in Parts" was nominated for the Turner Prize in the UK. Currently, a new film, "Dreaming the End", is showing at the Fondazione Memmo in Rome (to October 29). And their latest work — a series of five near-static video portraits — will be shown in Art Basel on the booth of their London gallery, Soft Opening. "I've had an eventful couple of years," they say. "I wanted to create stillness."

when you are born."



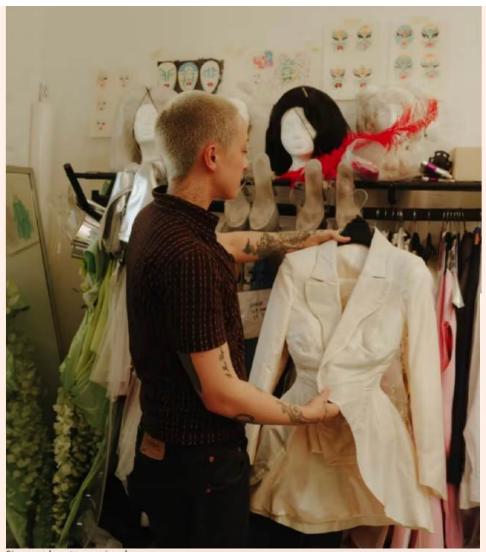
'Universal Dream' (2021) by Sin Wai Kin, which is make-up on a facial wipe



'Embodied Image' (2017) © Courtesy the artist/Soft Opening. Photo: Theo Christelis (2)

"The first time I did drag, it was alone in my room in 2013," says Sin when we meet at their studio in London's Vauxhall. Dressed in multicoloured, graphically patterned cargo pants and a baggy T-shirt, they are focused and poised, with all the stillness of the new portraits. "I started practising meditation in 2019," they explain. "It's given me that skill."

The space, too, is calm and organised, in spite of the rails of exuberant costumes, glittering shoes and brightly coloured wigs on stands. Sin's research tends to the literary; currently it is Stephen Hawking's *A Brief History of Time*. "Much of my work is about dissolution of assumptions around objective truth and reality. Reading about general relativity is aligning a lot with how I'm thinking about things," they say. A pinboard is covered with typed-out texts from writers including the science fiction authors Octavia Butler and Ursula Le Guin and the feminist social scientist Donna Haraway.



Sin uses drag to examine dreams





© Dan Wilton (2)

Sin, 32, moved to London aged 18. They have developed their practice with considerable care over a decade, using speculative storytelling to investigate bodily fluidity and the dissolution of binary constructs. It was a research trip to the Octavia Butler archive at the Huntington Library in Los Angeles that reinforced the importance of storytelling as a human technology, to question embedded beliefs. "Butler had a very difficult life and dealt with it in her fiction. She used fantasy to deal with the real," Sin says.

work. Over its 23 minutes, they borrow from Peking and Cantonese opera, Taoist philosophy and the films of Wong Kar-wai to create a parallel universe in which seven dream sequences play across the screen. It is in the realm of dreams, after all, that societal norms — and physical forms — can be subverted, side-stepped and entirely overthrown. Through two morphing characters, the Storyteller and the Construct, assumptions around gender and power are unravelled in lip-synced speech and physical transformations, their elaborately made-up faces vignetted against the backdrop of Taipei. Botticelli's Venus informs the final scene. "It's the idea of the ideal of beauty," says Sin.



Stills from 'A Dream of Wholeness in Parts' (2021) by Sin Wai Kin, nominated for the Turner Prize



© Courtesy the artist/Chi-Wen Gallery/Soft Opening (2)

Those same characters — both played by the artist — reappear in the video showing in Rome (until October 29). "Dreaming the End" was filmed over four days in the Italian capital and questions what is real and what is performance, as time, gender and place become slippery and blurred. There is rebirth and transformation; costumes that morph between masculine and feminine; a talking statue of Janus, himself the god of thresholds; and long flights of steps suggesting states of transition.

At Basel, Sin is hanging their quiet videos against thick white velvet curtains — creating both theatrical luxury and a white cube space. Those who know Sin's work will see familiar characters melding into art-historical poses. One references Caravaggio's Narcissus, another Frida Kahlo's 1940 "Self-portrait with Cropped Hair". In 2020, Sin cut off their hair and had it made into a wig. "It was like saying goodbye to a previous version of myself," they say. "Once it was something that grew out of my head, and then it became a costume." Questioning, perhaps, that binary load between the authentic and the performed.

Art Basel runs June 15-18, softopening.london

New York Times, 2023

Mixed Business at an Anxious Art Basel

Dealers were hoping to send positive signals in the face of a possible downturn, but the Swiss fair's bustle didn't always translate into sales.



A visitor taking a picture of one of the "Portraits" by the Canadian artist Sin Wai Kin, at the art gallery Soft Opening's booth at Art Basel on Tuesday. Fabrice Coffrini/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

But, as ever, collectors were also in pursuit of new works by <u>young "rising star" artists</u>, whose values can take a steep upward trajectory. At least 10 collectors bought examples of "Portraits" by the Canadian artist Sin Wai Kin, 32. These gender-fluid digital works, inspired by Cantonese and Peking Opera roles, were offered by the London gallery <u>Soft Opening</u> and priced between \$7,000-\$18,000. Liza Lacroix, 35, a fellow Canadian artist, sold a new abstract painting on the booth of <u>Gisela Capitain</u>, a dealer from Cologne, Germany, for \$36,000.

Artnet News, 2023

10 of the Best Artworks at Art Basel 2023, From New Provocations by Anne Imhof to a Bravura \$22 Million de Kooning

These are the booths that caught the eye of Artnet News's editor-in-chief.

Andrew Goldstein, June 15, 2023



Sin Wai Kin, presented by Soft Opening, London, in the Statements section of Art Basel. Courtesy of Art Basel.

In the chockablock booths of Art Basel are always mini Ali Baba's caves, treasures tastefully heaped upon treasures, only with those fineries sometimes taking the form of a poke in the eye or a punch in the gut. This year, however, shocks and innovations are less prominent—the knob has been dialed down to, let's say, a seven—as galleries tend to their bottom line, serving up comfort food to skittish collectors. There's plenty to feast on, of course, and you'll be hard-pressed to find a higher-quality fair this year. Here are some standouts.

Sin Wai Kin The Universe (2023) Soft Opening



Artnet News, 2023



Mutability and doubleness are the hallmarks of Sin Wai Kin's revelatory work, with the London-based Canadian artist blending drag performance, Cantonese opera, art history, and contemporary screen culture into dreamlike reimaginings of the world. Best known for their narrative films, which garnered the artist a Turner Prize nomination, they have also begun making standalone portraits of recurring characters, and this is the body of work shown by London's Soft Opening at the fair: looped moving-image tableaux that present these figures re-enacting works by Leonardo da Vinci, Man Ray, Frida Kahlo, and other artists.

In this portrait, the artist inhabits the role of "the Universe" as they recreate Ming Dynasty artist Lu Zhi's painting *Dreaming of a Butterfly*, which depicts the story of a man whose vivid dream of a butterfly leaves him uncertain, upon waking, whether he is a human dreaming of being a butterfly or a butterfly dreaming of being a human. In the piece itself (\$18,000), the figure lies sleeping on a fallen tree, the flower painted on their face echoing the flowers in the field waving gently in the background. A story of new possibilities is being told here, fluidly melding binaries of past and future, painting and video, East and West, male and female into something that has the ring of prophesy.

Artforum, 2023

June 13, 2023 at 2:24pm

SKY HOPINKA AND SIN WAI KIN WIN BALOISE ART PRIZE

American filmmaker Sky Hopinka and Canadian videographer Sin Wai Kin have been awarded the twenty-fourth Baloise Art Prize, the largest art prize affiliated with the Swiss iteration of Art Basel. The CHF 30,000 (\$33,000) award is presented annually to artists exhibiting in the Statements section of the fair, which focuses on emerging artists. The Baloise Group, a Swiss insurer which administers the prize in partnership with the fair, will purchase works by both artists and donate them to the Museum für Moderne Kunst Frankfurt and to MUDAM in Luxembourg.

The Ferndale, Washington-born Hopinka, a member of the Ho-Chunk Nation and a descendant of the Pechanga Band of Luiseño people, won for his four-channel film *Just a Soul Responding*, which is being presented at Art Basel by New York's Broadway gallery. The film, which layers texts about colonization and Indigenous pasts atop landscape montages explores trauma and loss, and is representative of Hopinka's oeuvre, in which he typically investigates the meanings of homeland and landscape and their relation to language and culture.

Sin, born in Toronto and living and working in London, won for their five-part video suite *Portraits*, presented at the fair by London's Soft Opening gallery. The works examine themes of masculinity, femininity, and binaries through various visual metaphors. Cantonese and Peking Opera influenced the work, and science fiction and drag have inspired past ones. Sin, a 2022 Turner Prize nominee, frequently centers speculative fiction within performance, moving image, and print in fantasy narratives that question the collective gaze and the idealized image.



'The Construct' (2023) by Sin Wai Kin, winner of this year's Baloise prize at Art Basel © Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London

The Art Market Collecting (+ Add to myFT

Sunshine and sales at Art Basel

Design fair to open in Paris; Hirst helps demystify NFTs in new film; Sotheby's offers Klimt for Europe's highest auction estimate

Melanie Gerlis JUNE 15 2023





Art Basel opened its 53rd Swiss edition to sunshine and sales with dealers pleased to see an influx of high-powered international visitors on the fair's opening days. "We were pleasantly surprised by how much more active this year has been than last year. It is a stark contrast to the disappointing auctions that we just witnessed. There's great material all around — it's a big win for the galleries," said David Zwirner. His high-volume early sales included Joan Mitchell's "Untitled" (1959), a bold abstract with an asking price of \$20mn, which sold to an unnamed, major European institution.

This fair can be make or break for younger gallerists in sections that restrict them to just one artist but one incentive is the Baloise Art Prize, a collaboration with the insurance company since 1999. This gives SFr30,000 (\$33,250) each to two emerging artists, whose work also goes into a museum collection, and was this year won by Sin Wai Kin (Soft Opening gallery) and Sky Hopinka (Broadway). Antonia Marsh, founder of Art Basel first-timer Soft Opening, was happy to report six further sales of editions of Sin's films at the fair, for up to \$29,000 each.

Artnet News, 2023

Art World

Which Artists Will Everyone Be Talking About in Basel This Year? Here's a Primer on 5 of the Week's Rising Stars

Get smart fast with our cheat sheet on five artists everyone will be talking about.

Artnet News, June 9, 2023



Right about now, the global art world is packing its
Rimowa suitcases and Louis Vuitton trunks, preparing to
descend on a small but mighty little financial center we
call Switzerland. They're picking out party clothes,
steeling their stomachs for the unholy quantities of
asparagus and champagne, and their accountants are
feeling an inexplicable neck pain. That's right folks, it's
Art Basel season.

At this year's edition of the flagship edition of the fair, there are plenty of artists who deserve your attention. But with 283 galleries showing—and multitudes of exhibitions unfolding at satellite events, museums, and institutions across the city— it can be hard to filter through the noise. Worry not; we've got you. Here are five artists whose careers we believe are primed to reach new heights.

Artnet News, 2023

Sin Wai Kin (b. 1991)



Sin Wai Kin, Change (film still) (2023). Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London.

Represented by: Soft Opening, London

Known for their adoption of drag as a medium while drawing on references from the traditional roles and aesthetics in Cantonese opera, Sin examines the themes of desire, identification, and consciousness in fiction narratives and storytelling through their work, whether it is performance, moving image, writing, or print. The "boundary-pushing nature" of their work has impressed a wide audience including the judges of last year's Turner Prize. After earning a nomination for the coveted Turner Prize last year—the youngest artist to receive that honor, at the age of 31-the London-based Sin has conceived the project "Portraits" for their Art Basel's presence. The project presents five nearly life-size filmed "living" portraits of five characters Sin created: "The Universe," "Change," "The Clowns," "The Constructs," and "The Storyteller." It serves as the artist's continuation of their exploration of storytelling as a means to interrogate binaries and fantasy narratives while examining how histories are created. Editions of films start at \$15,000.

-Vivienne Chow

Up there, watching over you since 1949

ArtReview



Sin Wai Kin

Sin Wai Kin

by Skye Sherwin



ArtReview

Dreaming of Me



November 2022 43



Sin Wai Kin first made a name for themselves onstage during the early 2010s as Victoria Sin, a drag persona that turned up the dial on Marilyn Monroe's Old Hollywood glamour and the impossible physical proportions of blowup dolls. There were prosthetic breasts, custom-built corsets and a huge platinum blonde wig that "looks like it are your wig for breakfast", as the character snipes in Define Gender, a 2017 film portrait of the artist. The makeup was just as big: Pierrotwhite face, exaggerated black-and-red mouth and fake eyelashes to sweep the floor with. It was a striking parody of the blonde bombshell. As Sin reflects during a visit to their studio, "Within capitalism, and British Art Show 9, make clear that the artist's vision has expanded

extreme representations are always going to be more successful because they're unattainable, and more polarised representations of things like gender become normalised. Drag is a purposeful doing of that, which also

undoes it." It's an argument implicit in the iconic trans performer and Monroe-obsessive Amanda Lepore's claim that she has 'the most expensive body on Earth'. "How Lepore literally blows [gender] up is very attractive to me," says Sin. "Like, "You want me to do this? Here

What gave Sin a critical edge in London's more experimental drag nights was that the performer then identified as a 'femme-presenting cis-girl', as they once put it, a 'female' drag queen. As an outlier in a scene dominated by white gay men, their position turned the dial on what it means to knowingly put on a gender. For Sin, a Canadian

of Cantonese descent, these initial forays were born of the need to explore their relationship with Western femininity. In the four short films that made up Narrative Reflections on Looking (2016-17), their graduate presentation at London's Royal College of Art, the camera moves up and down Victoria Sin's adorned and

"My reality seems like a madeup fantasy for some people. We are living in a world where many different realities coexist"

displayed body, which is as still as a poster pinup but for the artist's visible breathing. Sin's voiceover describes uncanny encounters with a teasing image of a woman who gazes back and looks just like the narrator - or nearly: "It was like looking into a mirror and finding that there was something missing in the reflection". The speaker's desire to consume the image has both a sexual and cannibalistic dimension, and this goes both ways. "I was eaten alive," they purt.

A sweep of the films and sculptures that make up Sin's presentations in two current UK group exhibitions, this year's Turner Prize

> considerably in recent years. The characters they play include members of a boyband who parade their literally singular qualities in a music-promo lineup and housewives with killer chopine platform shoes, bare fake

breasts and Cantonese-opera face-paint. There's an extraterrestrial newsreader who broadcasts a contradictory report from another galaxy and an Asian action hero who struts down a midnight street with a white fur draped off the shoulder. Steeped in personal history, Chinese culture and science fiction, their painted faces have moved beyond those of the early 'gender clowns'. Sin's voiceover - be it velveteen and girlish, or deeper with a synthetic ring – spins dreamlike scenes and poses probing questions through which binaries are set up and knocked down, be it male/female, fact/fiction or subject/ object. In their universe, there's even a dumpling that talks.

It was in 2020 that Sin's project underwent some significant evolutions. Having cut their long hair into boyish curtains and reverted from Victoria to Wai Kin (their Chinese name), they created the first fully fledged masculine character to take an ongoing place in their work. With orange hair and makeup that channels

preceding pages A Dream of Wholeness in Parts (still), 2021, single-channel video, 4K, colour, sound, 23 min 3 sec. Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London

above Narrative Reflections On Looking, Part One / She Was More Than The Sum Of My Parts (still), 2016, single-channel video, 4K, colout, sound, 3 min 35 sec. Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London

ArtReview 44



It's Always You Cutouts, 2021 (installation view, Blindspot Gallery presentation at Frieze London, 2022), set of 4, UV cured ink on foamex, dimensions variable. Courtesy the artist and Blindspot Gallery, London

November 2022 45



the story charges the body charges (repeating) rehearsal, 12 May 2022, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Photo: Enid Alvarez. ©Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum

46 ArtReview

Art Review, 2022



the story charges the body charges (repeating) rehears al, 12 May 20 22, Solotmon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Photo: Enid Alvarez. © Solotmon R. Guggenheim Museum

Art Review, 2022



It's Always You Signed Poster (The Storpteller), 2021 (installation view, Blindspot Gallery presentation at Frieze London, 2021). UV cured ink on matt white back poster paper, acrylic ink, acrylic showcase, 85×60×4 cm. Courtesy the artist and Blindspot Gallery, London

48 ArtReview

Art Review, 2022

cosmic symbols, including a blue starry sky, white moon and red flames, The Storyteller looks like a being from outer space. (It's no surprise to hear that speculative-fiction writers Ursula Le Guin and Octavia Butler have made an impression on the artist.) Inspired by that traditionally male figure of supposed authority, the newsreader, in Today's Top Stories (2020), the Storyteller's report is structured around opposing statements concerning certain death and immortality, dreams and waking life, cohesion and separation, as unstable as the blue star imploding in the background. His bulletins include the severing of self and other through language: "in the telling there is a dividing", he informs us. (A poststructuralist riff on 'fake news' perhaps?) The instability is underscored by references to Zhuangzi's third-century thought experiment, Dream of the Butterfly, in which the Daoist philosopher questions if he is a man dreaming he's a butterfly or a butterfly dreaming he's a man. "I identified with it in that my reality seems like a madeup fantasy for some people," says the artist. "We are living in a world where many different realities coexist."

The Storyteller has since appeared in a number of Sin's films, including the their herilliantly ercept take on buybands of the peg appeal. It's Always You (2021). Here, the character is the serious one in a fourman lineup of reductive types (alongside the childish one, the heart-throb and the pretty boy), as flat as mirrors onto which their fans can direct their own reflection. The artist's interest in the butterfly dream meanwhile has led to their longest and most ambitious work to date, A Dream of Wholeness in Parts (2021), a 23-minute film shot on location in Taiwan. In it, the narrator's voice takes on the lulling tones of a sleep meditation, guiding the viewer / listener through seven scenes inspired by the artist's dreams. There are two recurring characters with traditional roots. The Universe, with blue hair and floral facepaint, draws on the warrior archetype from Cantonese opera, while The Construct corresponds to the female roles known as The Daan. Yet Sin strikes beyond the binaries of gender here, to shake up reality

on a grand scale. The voiceover veers from descriptions of trees, moonlight on skin and food, to nightmarishly being cut in two by elevator
doors and, more hopefully, the ruined landscape of one's forebears
that is left behind. The images with which this narration is paired do
not necessarily match up. The meaning of a description of oily glistening broth and thin-skinned dumplings turns extra-slippery when
set against a shot of a bare-breasted character with long black hair
posing on a windy rocky beach strewn with flowers. With psychedelic
verve, there are moments when a talking tree-trunk, chess-piece and
wonton soup take over speaking the characters' lines. It's a 'carrier
bag' fiction of the kind advocated by Le Guin, its components left to
jostle side by side, free from the prescribed journey and conclusions
more linear tales might force us to take.

Sin's characters are category-hopping creatures of flux, donned for public appearances onstage or in front of a camera. Yet the artist has also found a way to memorialise the fleeting personas using a material ubiquitous in drag-club dressing rooms: the face wipe. Putting the emphasis on the 'taking off' as much as the 'putting on' of a persona, these works preserve the madeup faces on tissue, along with the sweat and skin cells mortal bodies shed beneath the paint. The face prints make us think about the 'self' underneath the fabrication, yet Sin exposes this perceived division between performer and role as another binary to be dismantled. After it was cut, the artist also turned the long black hair that had signified their 'authentic identity' offstage into a wig. It's worn by The Construct and can be seen IRL at the British Art Show. The title says it all: Costume for Dreaming (2021).

Work by Sin Wai Kin can be seen in the Turner Prize exhibition, Tate Liverpool, through 19 March and as part of British Art Show 9, various venues, Plymouth, through 23 December

Skye Sherwin is a writer based in Rochester



ADream of Wholenes in Parts, 2021, single-channel video, 4K, colout, sound, 23 min 3 sec. Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London

November 2022 49

Cura, 2022

Sin Wai Kin



42

Cura, 2022

Text by Courtney Malick Portrait by South Ho

"The name is the guest of the substance." This seminal line comes early on in the recent video work of Canadian artist Sin Wai Kin, A Dream of Wholeness in Parts (2021). As traditional bamboo music wafts within the scene, we hear these words as a voice-over recited by the artist, and their image, dolled up in a dramatic look that lays somewhere between drag and kabuki, appears on screen in a number of highly constructed countenances. Mirroring this inherent sentiment of guest and host, which permeates so much of artistic and cultural discourse, we first see the protagonist of this tale doubling in on themselves, with the exception of one version's vivid eye make up be ing green and the other's blue. With the classic political symbol of a chess board positioned directly between them, they sit, almost entirely indistinguishable from one another, in full glam; dark banged wigs, satiny off-white fitted blazers with massive plastic busts and pinkish nips pushing the lapels almost into their armpits as dangly rhinestone chokers drip into their prosthetic cleavage, matching knee-length skirts and massive bridal-inspired stilt-like platforms teetering on their edges be neath crossed legs. Appearing like twins gazing at once toward each other and yet knowingly heedful of the camera's ever-intrusive lens, they barely move, apathetic and completely contrived. It is clear from the onset that these characters are existing in a decorative and ulterior microcosm, and yet their god, so to speak, is the almost automated sound of the voice looming large from what feels like some all-knowing place far above them. These twins' movements and subtle facial expressions are guided by the introspective musings of this overarching spoken narrative.

The more this overlord spouts out existentially crafted phrases that intimate the vast expanse of time and the perpetual construction and crumbling of societies, cultures, families, the more elaborate, environmental and symbolic the face of the protagonist becomes. With a sky-scape sprawling from ear to ear that encompasses imagery of the sun, the stars, plants, the sea, and the land, they morph from the initial sultry drag twins into something of a hermaphroditic, robotic deity. Amidst this shape-shifting, the idea of names arises again and again throughout the work's fragmented, objective kind of storytelling. With each mention of what something is called, or was once called, or the divisions that names draw around abstractions of conceptual agreements, Sin Wai Kin alludes to the reality that now, almost a third of the way into the 21st century, we see language changing, as technologies seep deeper and deeper into our lives, minds and even our actual bodies.

While the Siri-like voice that mulls over details as minute as a slick of oil across the cheek of a potential lover, and as broad and mundane as a metaphor merging the clear broth of a bowl of pho filled with taught-skinned dumplings with a landscape of rippling seas and pointy-peaked mountains, their focus on questions of language becomes all the more central. Åt the same time, the visages and scenarios that we find our protagonist meandering within-which include eating the aforementioned, lofty bowl of noodles, traipsing through manicured forests while talking to animated trunks of ancient trees, and perfectly posing bare-plastic-breasted in a cinched corset facing away from a dark and undulating sea—are only obliquely associated with the poetic ideals that the diaristic voice from above brings up for consideration and then just as suddenly lays back down, moving on to the next observation.

This isn't, of course, the first time that a work of video art has exaggerated the disconnect between its imagery and its verbal narrative. However, in this instance, the slippage between the two feels particularly apt, as the top bracket of what we think of as the youngest generation of adults; millennials, approach middle age, and at the same time we see those making up the next cohort-Gen-Z-rather drastically moving toward a far more visualized way of communicating. Iconography like "tap-back" responses in smartphone texting platforms, emojis and memojis (that actually mimic in real time the facial expressions of the user through animated and customizable virtual "masks") have become notonly standard modés of correspondence both in private and public forums, but beyond that, video clips, filters and lifted and manipulated imagery has replaced, in large part, full sentences (or any sentences at all for that matter) in much of the most prevalent content creation leading media today like Tik-Tok, Instagram, Reels, etc. These newer kinds of outputs allow for a baseline of expressions that lack details or individualization. On one hand, we can see this as a positive in that it resists the perpetuation of the kinds of binary barriers that can breed conflict and bias, asseems to be much of the underlying crux that Sin Wai Kin's work teases out. On the other hand, however, the universality of this all-encompassing new shorthand also leads to a generalized opacity that bypasses often critical, underlying information.

In this sense, it's not just that the work is compelling visually—as it most certainly is, with its vibrant, over-thetop aesthetic that incorporates such fantastical characters—but, moreover, that it reflects, whether purposefully or not, a significant communicative shift taking place that will surely continue to shape and alter culture and discourse going forward. One in which moods, tones and vibes loom larger and disseminate farther merely by their inherent attachment to visual icons-turned-stand-ins that act in place of more nuanced attitudes and fully formed opinions. When communications are slimmed down to essentials in this way, it can make for greater understanding, but whether or not an interpretive reception can flourish or might degrade over time, remains to be seen. Its in that contextual limbo that Sin Wai Kin's works not only seem to operate, but more importantly, resonate as we wait to see.

Cura, 2022



Prizes // News

Contemporary drag and fruity sculpture: Turner Prize 2022 shortlist announced

Exhibition for the award returns to Tate Liverpool this October after a 15-year hiatus



From top left, clockwise: Heather Phillipson, Ingrid Pollard, Sin Wai Kin, Veronica Ryan.

Photos: Rory Van Millingen; Emile Holbar; Vic Lentaigne; Steven Probert © Veronica Ryan, courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.

Gareth Harris

12 April 2022

The nominees for the 2022 Turner Prize include Veronica Ryan, who created the Hackney Windrush commission in London, and Heather Phillipson whose Fourth Plinth commission in Trafalgar Square—a swirl of whipped cream topped with a drone—is still turning heads. The other nominees are the Black British photographer Ingrid Pollard and Sin Wai Kin (formerly Victoria Sin) who identifies as non-binary. The prize returns to Tate Liverpool this year (20 October-19 March 2023) after a 15-year hiatus.



Heather Phillipson's *THE END* (2017) © David Parry/PA Wire

Phillipson's subversive work on the Fourth Plinth, *THE END* (2017), is the 13th piece to be commissioned for the prestigious public art platform located in the heart of London. "I wanted to make my own news. I wanted to make a monument to hubris and impending collapse," she told the *Financial Times*. "Last year Phillipson reimagined the Duveen Galleries at Tate Britain as a sequence of "charged ecosystems, maladaptive seasons and unearthed lifeforms". She discussed her recent maximalist exhibition at Tate on *The Week in Art* podcast.



Installation view of Veronica Ryan's *Along a Spectrum* (2021) at Spike Island, Bristol

Commissioned by Spike Island, Bristol and supported by Freelands

Foundation. Photo: Max McClure. © Veronica Ryan. Courtesy of Spike Island, Bristol, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York and Alison Jacques, London

Veronica Ryan has worked with tropical fruit, feathers and dust, dyeing and embroidering a wide variety of fabrics, casting works in plaster, bronze and clay. After a number of high-profile shows in the 1980s and early 1990s, she went off the art world radar however. In an interview with *The Art Newspaper* last year, Ryan said: "Although I didn't finish my MPhil at Soas [the School of Oriental and African Studies in London] I'm interested in archaeology and anthropology, thinking about early cultures and the creative ways that people have always needed to express themselves and I see my work as a continuation of that." She is nominated for her solo exhibition *Along a Spectrum* at Spike Island, Bristol, last year.



A still from Sin Wai Kin's video *It's Always You* (2021) Courtesy of the artist and Blindspot Gallery

The Canadian-born artist Sin Wai Kin was nominated following their participation in the British Art Show 9 (BAS9) and their solo presentation at Blindspot Gallery, Frieze London, last year. "The jury highlighted their film *Dream of Wholeness in Parts* (2021) in which traditional Chinese philosophy and dramaturgy intersects with contemporary drag, music and poetry," a Tate statement says. "Through parody, the artist reveals and interrogates constructed images of idealised Western femininity. In recent years, their drag aesthetic has drawn upon roles

found in Peking and Cantonese Opera," a statement from BAS9 says.



Installation view of Ingrid Pollard's *Carbon Slowly Turning* at MK Gallery Photo: Rob Harris

Ingrid Pollard was nominated for her <u>solo exhibition last</u> year, *Carbon Slowly Turning*, at MK Gallery, Milton Keynes. A key figure in the Black British art movement in the 1980s, and an active member of grassroots campaigns for women's liberation and LGBTQ rights, Pollard has been making experimental work that explores themes such as race, sexuality and identity for more than 40 years. "She raises questions around Britain's history, its entanglement with empire, slavery and colonialism, and how the residues of this are still embedded in the landscape today," the MK Gallery curator Gilane Tawadros said.

The Turner Prize winner is awarded £25,000 with £10,000 going to the other artists shortlisted. The members of the Turner Prize 2022 jury are Irene Aristizábal, the head of Curatorial and Public practice at BALTIC; Christine Eyene, a research fellow at the School of Arts and Media at University College London; Robert Leckie, the director of Spike Island; and Anthony Spira, the director of MK Gallery.

Helen Legg, the director of Tate Liverpool, says in a statement: "The jury has travelled the length and breadth of the country, taking advantage of the easing of lockdown

to enjoy the explosion of creativity that has emerged from the pandemic. The result is a diverse group of artists, each with a singular vision, who impressed the judges with the intensity of their presentations, while also dealing with important issues facing our society today."

The Guardian, 2022

Turner prize: Trafalgar Square whipped cream and fly sculpture among shortlist

Heather Phillipson, Ingrid Pollard, Veronica Ryan and Sin Wai Kin in running as prize returns to Liverpool

Adrian Searle: this is a lip-smacking shortlist



➡ THE END, a sculpture of a giant swirl of whipped cream, a cherry, a fly and a drone that transmits a live feed, in Trafalgar Square, central London. Photograph: SOPA Images/LightRocket/Getty Images

The artist who installed the fourth plinth sculpture in Trafalgar Square featuring a dollop of whipped cream topped with a cherry, a drone and a fly has been shortlisted for this year's Turner prize.

Heather Phillipson joins Ingrid Pollard, Veronica Ryan and Sin Wai Kin on this year's shortlist for the prize, as it returns to Liverpool for the first time in 15 years.

The artists in the running for the world's best-known awards for visual art use different media and forms of expression to help people reconnect with each other and the world around them, as societies emerge from the pandemic.

Phillipson was nominated for her solo exhibition RUPTURE NO 1: blowtorching the bitten peach at Tate Britain and her Trafalgar Square fourth plinth commission, THE END. Her practice involves collisions of different materials, media and gestures in what she calls "quantum thought experiments".

The jury described the overwhelming experience of visiting Phillipson's immersive Tate exhibition after lockdown "and applauded the way she splices absurdity, tragedy and imagination to probe urgent and complex ideas".

Pollard was nominated for her solo exhibition Carbon Slowly Turning at MK Gallery in Milton Keynes. Working primarily in photography, but also sculpture, film and sound, her work questions our relationship with the natural world and interrogates ideas such as Britishness, race and sexuality.

The Guardian, 2022



Ingrid Pollard's Carbon Slowly Turning. Photograph: Rob Harris

The Tate said Pollard's work had for decades uncovered stories and histories hidden in plain sight. "[The jury] were struck by the bold new developments in Pollard's recent work, especially a new series of kinetic, anthropomorphic sculptures, which build on Pollard's career-long enquiry into the figure moving through space," it added.

Nominated for her solo exhibition Along a Spectrum at Spike Island, Bristol, and her Hackney Windrush art commission in London, Ryan creates sculptural objects and installations using containers, compartments, and combinations of natural and fabricated forms to reference displacement, fragmentation and alienation.



Veronica Ryan's Windrush sculptures. Photograph: Martin Godwin/The Guardian

The jury praised her new body of work made during a residency at Spike Island, which explores ecology, history and dislocation, as well as the psychological impact of the pandemic. They were struck by the "exquisite sensuality and tactility of her sculptures, both in the gallery and for the public commission in Hackney", the Tate said.

Sin was nominated for their involvement in the British Art Show 9 and solo presentation at Blindspot Gallery at the Frieze London art fair. They tell stories through performance, moving image, writing, and print.

Drawing on their own experience existing between binary categories, "their work realises fictional narratives to describe lived realities of desire, identification, and consciousness", the Tate said. The jury highlighted Sin's film Dream of Wholeness in Parts 2021, in which traditional Chinese

The Guardian, 2022

philosophy and dramaturgy intersects with contemporary drag, music and poetry.



Sin Wai Kin's A Dream of Wholeness in Parts. Photograph: Courtesy the artist, Chi-Wen Gallery, Taipei and Soft Opening, London

The Turner prize aims to promote public debate around new developments in contemporary British art. Established in 1984, it is named after the radical British painter JMW Turner (1775-1851). Each year, a winner is awarded £25,000 with £10,000 going to each of the other shortlisted artists.

Tate Liverpool was the first gallery outside London to host the prize in 2007 when it helped launch the city's year as European Capital of Culture.

Alex Farquharson, the director of Tate Britain and co-chair of the Turner Prize jury, said: "With so many museums and galleries reopening in May 2021, it's been a terrific 12 months for contemporary British art, as demonstrated by this excitingly rich and varied Turner prize shortlist.

"Art has provided much-needed enjoyment and escape over the past year, but it has also helped to reconnect us with each other and the world around us, as the practices of the four shortlisted artists variously exemplify."

Helen Legg, the director of Tate Liverpool and co-chair of the Turner prize jury, said: "The jury has travelled the length and breadth of the country, taking advantage of the easing of lockdown to enjoy the explosion of creativity that has emerged from the pandemic. The result is a diverse group of artists, each with a singular vision, who impressed the judges with the intensity of presentations, while also dealing with important issues facing our society today."

Last year's prize was won by the Array Collective, an 11-strong group of artists from across the sectarian divide in Northern Ireland. They beat four other art collectives, the first time no individual artist was shortlisted for the prize.

This year's winner will be announced at a ceremony in December and an exhibition of their work will be held at the Tate Liverpool from 20 October 2022 to 19 March 2023.

THE BRITISH MUSEUM TO PRESENT ITS FIRST EXHIBITION OF EMERGING BRITISH ARTISTS.



Sin Wai Kin, something more violent than recognition, 19 April 2017, make up on facial wipe. Reproduced by permission of the artist © The Trustees of the British Museum

In a first for the British Museum, a series of exciting new acquisitions by emerging British artists, will be the focus of a new exhibition. *Drawing attention: emerging British artists* will exhibit more than 20 new acquisitions by contemporary emerging artists many of which have never been displayed before. These artists have lived, studied, or worked in the UK, and their work will be displayed alongside drawings by renowned figures including Michelangelo and Andy Warhol.

Twenty-four works, acquired with the support of an Art Fund New Collecting Award, showcase innovative new approaches, methods and materials, with the emerging artists using mediums ranging from make-up on a facial wipe to coloured pencil on paper, experimenting with the boundaries of what a drawing can be.

Collections are at the very heart of a museum's work, and the British Museum's prints and drawings collection is one of the very best in the world. But it is vitally important for future generations that it continues to develop, so we are grateful to Art Fund's New Collecting Award for allowing us to strengthen our holdings with exciting new British artists.

Hartwig Fischer, Director of the British Museum

Fifteen pieces from the British Museum's world-renowned collection of prints and drawings will also be included in the exhibition, highlighting continuities in drawing across time. Famous artists ranging from Michelangelo to Andy Warhol, Käthe Kollwitz and Antony Gormley, will be on show alongside the new acquisitions, which include works by Sin Wai Kin (formerly known as Victoria Sin; b.1991), Rosie Hastings & Hannah Quinlan (both b.1991) and Jessie Makinson (b.1985). These acquisitions reflect on, extend and develop the existing collections, and expand the wide range of subjects and techniques found in the national collection of Western prints and drawings cared for by the British

"It is very meaningful to have my works acquired as part of the Art Fund New Collecting Award project.
As an emerging artist, having my work in the British Museum Prints and Drawings collection is important to my legacy. It was a joy to work with curator Isabel Seligman

on this acquisition. I am thrilled that my two works What you have gained along the way and Something more violent than recognition will be held by the Prints and Drawings collection in particular. As an artist who studied both drawing and print, I am honoured to contribute directly to these canons and have them placed in conversation with the historical traditions of

Sin Wai Kin, artist,

The new acquisitions from these emerging artists bring stories and perspectives not currently represented in the Museum collection, including artists addressing challenging questions of identity, gender, sexuality and social justice. Some of the artists look inwards, exploring their personal experiences, while others confront complex social issues such as LGBTQ+ representation and the experience of other marginalised groups.

The exhibition is formed of three sections: Self and Other, Alternate Histories and Medium and Materiality. Self and Other highlights how drawing - a medium historically used as a means of self-examination – can be used to investigate the relationship between the personal and external. Highlights include drawings by Jessie Makinson, who takes inspiration from ecofeminist writings and traditions of speculative fiction. In Makinson's drawings the worlds of the human and non-human collide, and are inhabited by fluid, anthropomorphic figures. In Makinson's And Other Darlings (2021) figures sporting tails, pointed ears or spotted skins, have ambiguous relations toward one another which could be perceived as both erotic and menacing. Many of the figures seem to be engaged in rituals, games or dances – though it is not clear if they are helping or hindering one another. The work will be shown alongside a drawing of a Pictish woman by the $16^{ ext{th}}$ century English artist.

The exhibition is formed of three sections: Self and Other, Alternate Histories and Medium and Materiality. Self and Other highlights how drawing – a medium historically used as a

Alternate Histories includes powerful but marginalised stories and draws attention to lesser-known histories. Artist duo Rosie Hastings & Hannah Quinlan's work addresses the loss of gueer spaces around the UK by depicting the cabaret bar Funny Girls, a mainstay of Blackpool's nightlife for over 25 years. Their eponymous drawing Funny Girls (2019) reimagines the bar as a vast church-like building with classical proportions recalling Renaissance books of perspective. Within this space Hastings & Quinlan bring to life the complexities of the musical theatre character the 'Diva': charismatic, larger than life, and often a means for gay playwrights to express their queerness at a time when to do so openly was dangerous and illegal. Many of the figures are modelled on those of historic artists, such as Michelangelo and Andrea Mantegna, whose drawings are held in the British Museum's collection. Michelangelo's preparatory study for the ignudi (decorative nude figures) on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel will be shown alongside the drawing it helped to inspire.

The final section of the exhibition, Medium and Materiality, explores the physicality of these artworks. Sin Wai Kin's witty and experimental drawings something more violent than recognition (2017) and what you have gained along the way (2017) were created by removing the artist's caked-on drag makeup with a face wipe to create a series of 'Impressions'. The artist identifies as non-binary, using they/them pronouns, and their 'Impressions' series examines the performative nature of gender, as well as the blurred boundary between drawing and printmaking. By using their body to create a direct impression, the works provide an intimate record of the artist; they also echo a myth about the origins of printmaking as deriving from the sudarium of St Veronica, a cloth which received a miraculous impression of Christ's face after he used it to wipe away his sweat and blood. There are many examples in the collection, such as a striking woodcut by the German Renaissance artist Hans Burgkmair, which will be shown alongside Sin's drawing.

Drawing attention is the culmination of a £50,000 Art Fund New Collecting Award which was awarded to Monument Trust Curator of Modern and Contemporary Drawing Isabel Seligman to research, acquire and display around 20 drawings made by emerging artists who have studied, lived or worked in the UK.

The free exhibition Drawing attention: emerging British artists opens at the British Museum on 17th March – 28th August 2022 in Room 90. Generously supported by Art Fund

Artforum, 2022



Sin Wai Kin, Preface/Looking Without Touching, 2017, HD video, color, sound, 1 minute 2 seconds.

Sin Wai Kin

BLINDSPOT GALLERY

In "It's Always You," Sin Wai Kin (formerly known as Victoria Sin) cast a dazzling cross-cultural dragnet to celebrate the plurality of possible identities in a world where binaries still dominate our collective imagination. The multimedia exhibition, with works made between 2016 and 2021, was an ode to disassembling preconceived notions of being in favor of the open-ended journey of becoming.

The itinerary began with *Preface/Looking Without Touching*, 2017, a single-channel video installation showing the artist in a diamanté choker, red lingerie, and matching thigh-high boots stretched out on a red-satin surface. As in many of Sin's works, the accompanying narration guides us through a process of looking closely at this body and reflecting on our own (mediated) assumptions and desires: "Picture an image, this image has been floating in your mind, you know the one. . . . What is she saying to you? . . . She loves you, you know, it's just that she's trapped in your picture plane." The libidinal investment is mutual, because "she" is as equally entranced with us as we are with her.

Sin, a child of a globalized world, expands on the poststructural critique of representation to unsettle the fantasy of wholeness. Their magisterial film *A Dream of Wholeness in Parts*, 2021, scrambles gender constructs by combining archetypes from Cantonese opera and the Taoist writings of Chuang Tzu with contemporary drag culture, references to Hong Kong cinema, and icons of Western painting. The establishing shot presents two virtually identical characters, both playing the opera's female lead, sitting across from each other and separated by a chessboard. The face of one is painted blue and pink, which in traditional Cantonese opera signifies innocence and loyalty; the other, painted in yellow and green, is a paragon of treachery. In Cantonese opera, male and female performers can play both gender roles; this provides an opening for Sin to consider how Western drag, which they characterize as "an embodied speculative fiction," can be a space of queer and trans freedom. At once reality and performance, drag offers a way to contest socially imposed identities.

Artforum, 2022

To explore how prepackaged personas become sites of reinvention through drag, the two-channel video *It's Always You*, 2021, has Sin starring as four different members of a boy band. Each icon has a different role to play in the shared effort to woo a mass public: The Universe (the pretty boy), The Storyteller (the serious one), The One (the childish one), and Wai King (the heartthrob). Performing identical dance moves, each character takes center stage to deliver the same saccharine lyrics, which are simultaneously projected on the screen karaoke style: IT'S ALWAYS YOU, YOU'RE THE ONE IN ME, YOU TELL MY DIFFERENT SIDES, MY MULTIPLICITY. . . . ONE PLUS ONE'S NOT TWO, WHEN BABY YOU'RE WITH ME, IT'S ALWAYS YOU, YOU'RE LIKE INFINITY. In this parody of hegemonic masculinity and its commercialization, "you" are invited to add your singular voice to a boundless, ever-changing aggregate.

Sin's practice combines drag as a performative resistance to gender stereotypes with storytelling as a dissemination of never-ending fictions. Their unruly mashup of images, narratives, cultures, and contexts is an appeal to us to envision communities freed from the strictures of binary thinking.

— Nuit Banai

Art Asia Pacific, 2022

3in Wai Kin: Self, World, Universe

BY TIFFANY LEUNG



Portrait of SIN WAI KIN. All images courtesy the artist and Blindspot Gallery, Hong Kong.

"It felt like home," Sin Wai Kin said effusively when asked about their month-long trip to Hong Kong in November 2021. Born to a Hong Kong Chinese father and a White British mother, Sin grew up in Toronto and is now based in London. They have been to Hong Kong on several occasions, with their father as a child and later on as an artist, but never stopping for more than a week. This time, it was to launch their most ambitious solo exhibition to date, which also happened to be their first solo presentation in Asia, at Blindspot Gallery. Sin's survey spanned works from 2016, when they finished their graduate degree at London's Royal College of Art, to 2021, and showcased their ability to bring fantasy to life through moving image, performance, writing, and other media. Part homecoming, part retrospective, the exhibition also offered an opportunity for renewed reflection for Sin, whose identity embraces fluidity and transience. "It was the largest space I've ever had to work with, and having all my work in one place has enabled me to see how my thinking has developed and changed," they explained.

Art Asia Pacific, 2022



SIN WAI KIN, Preface/Looking without Touching, 2017, still from single-channel video: 1 min 2 sec.

Over the last few years, Sin has created and embodied a range of feminine and masculine drag characters. Earlier videos like *Narrative Reflections on Looking* (2016–17) and *Tell me everything you saw, and what you think it means* (2018) feature Victoria Sin (the name Sin used to go by), an exaggerated, old-Hollywood female archetype who wears a luscious, platinum wig, over-the-top makeup, and balloon-like silicone breasts. The persona was born out of Sin's nascent exposure to London's fluid drag scene, where, unlike the homonormative drag that they had experienced in Toronto, it was "about blowing up gender and identity completely." By reclaiming qualities of hyper-femininity and Whiteness, drag became "an excavation of all the things I've been socialized with," they said. Around four years after their first appearance, however, Victoria is no longer front and center in Sin's practice. They last appeared in the performance *Sandwich* (2021) at WorldPride Malmö, where Sin made a cheese sandwich, evoking 1950s cooking shows for housewives. "I've gotten what I needed from [Victoria] and I started thinking about what else I can bring into my drag practice," the artist elucidated. The exercise of putting on and taking off a character had prompted them to ask the questions: who do I want to be now? What are other identities I want to embrace?



SIN WAI KIN, Today's Top Stories, 2020, still from single-channel video: 6 min 30 sec.

It was during a lockdown in 2020 when new perspectives emerged and manifested. Isolated at home, Sin suddenly found themself in heightened sensitivity in relation to their body: "It made me realize that my relationship with my body has completely transformed from a few years ago," they recalled. "I want to embrace masculinity in a way I haven't done before." Also lamenting a recent breakup, they found themself repeatedly listening to popular 1990s break-up songs like "I Want You Back" by NSYNC and binging music videos by boy bands from the Backstreet Boys to BTS, which gave them the idea to transform into "a teenage heartthrob." "I started collecting images of boy-band haircuts and photoshopping their hair onto my face, to help me decide on my new hairstyle," they shared.

Art Asia Pacific, 2022

Their growing interest in new conceptions of self led Sin to restore their Cantonese name, 慧乾 (Wai Kin), which means wisdom and intelligence. The latter character is also one of eight trigrams representing the principles of reality in the Taoist cosmology, and denotes heaven, creativity, and masculine (yang) energy. Simultaneously, because, for Sin, the line between life and performance is consistently blurred, their personal discovery bled into their works, and they began developing a set of masculine drag characters.

A sample of Sin's new direction and one of their most ambitious films yet, *A Dream of Wholeness in Parts* (2019–21)—currently touring as part of the British Art Show 9—brings together two of their new alter egos in "a self-contained universe." Woven together by a speculative narrative and reveries of landscapes, the film takes its inspiration from *Dream of the Butterfly* (c. 300 BC), a Taoist allegory by Chuang Tzu that delineates a philosopher who wakes up from a vivid dream in which he was a butterfly, only to find that he is no longer sure which state of consciousness is true. The Universe, one of the protagonists, references the Zing's (warrior) role in Peking and Cantonese opera, and a mercurial masculine archetype from Wong Kar Wai's films—fey and graceful, yet also tempestuous and vulnerable—frequently embodied by Hong Kong actors Leslie Cheung and Tony Leung. The Construct, the other star, is influenced by a feminine archetype in Cantonese opera known as the Daan role. Both of them don a series of resplendent outfits, faces painted in vivid colors. The verbose script that they enact in both English and Cantonese is also transposed between subjects and objects: occasionally a tree and a bowl of wonton noodles are animated, as if speaking back or speaking for characters, creating a sense that they are slipping in and out of dreams, unsure about where reality lies. Departing from Victoria Sin, the personae transcend explicit gender and racial binaries, and synthesize other "false dichotomies"—life and death, self and other, dreaming and waking, truth and fiction, tangible and metaphysical.



SIN WAI KIN, It's Always You, 2021, stills from two-channel video: 4 min 5 sec

In another recent body of multimedia work, *It's Always You* (2021), which debuted at Zürich's Shedhalle in 2021, The Universe reappears as "the pretty boy" of a boy band. The expansive series consists of a karaoke-style music video and memorabilia including signed posters with imitative fold marks, as if pulled from a teen magazine, and life-size cardboard cutouts of each band member. Performing alongside The Universe is The Storyteller (the serious one), The One (the childish sweetheart), and Wai King (the heartthrob), all played by Sin. They dance, with effortless charisma, and lip sync to a mesmerizing voiceover by the artist. "The boyband is the perfect vehicle for thinking about desire; the concept was created exactly for that purpose, constructed to provoke the most intense desire, for mostly teenage girls, but also everybody else, the most dreamy, the most whatever," said Sin. Conjured by fantastical narratives and overlapping stories, Sin's figures are treated as devices of their thoughts and desire. "Each character is an embodiment of something I am trying to work through myself," they explained. These identities are in a constant wheel of reinvention, deconstructed and recast each time they appear in a new work, reveling in their complexity and hybridity.

Every time Sin puts on a face and embodies a role, it changes them in some way, including their relationship with their body and the surrounding world. Meanwhile, for the audience, each persona is an invitation to recognize the perspectives and narratives that limit our lives, and to ponder ways to unravel these ways of seeing and being. The artist's work tests the boundary between self and world, seeking, but never securely defining their meanings. "The only everlasting truth is change," Sin quoted of science-fiction writer Octavia E. Butler. While the inhabitants in Sin's universe continue to change and evolve, so do they.



A Dream of Wholeness in Parts

2021. Single-channel video, 4K, colour, sound. 23 minutes 3 seconds. Commissioned by the British Art Show 9. Produced by Chi-Wen Productions, Taipei. Courtesy the artist, Chi-Wen Gallery, Taipei and Soft Opening, London.

CONTRIBUTOR:

O. H. FLETCHER

September 2021

INTERVIEW WITH SIN WAI KIN

During a performance of A VIEW FROM ELSEWHERE (2019), Torontoborn artist Sin Wai Kin wore a floor length gown with matching evening gloves. As the fantasy in three acts unfolded, one side of their mouth transformed into a smirk. The performance was characterised by an unapologetic exhaustion as Sin Wai Kin lip-synced over a provocative track about the demands of the audiences' gaze: 'She's here.... So, go on, look at her.'

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PARTS (2021), influenced by Cantonese opera, Sin Wai Kin toys with – and queers – tradition. They appear as several characters at once, presenting interpretations of Cantonese operatic archetypes. One such character is The Universe, a reinterpretation of the Zing (warrior) role, appearing in a diamanté Libertal and Carlo (10 ° E' 'A' ST Libertal and Libertal and Libertal and Carlo (10 ° E' 'A' ST Libertal and Libertal and Libertal and Libertal and Carlo (10 ° E' 'A' ST Libertal and Libertal and Libertal and Libertal and Carlo (10 ° E' 'A' ST Libertal and Lib

for truth production. Actuality is regarded as just another lacklustre accessory.

In the past year, Sin Wai Kin's performances have taken the form of virtual commissions, such as TOTAL FABRICATION (2020), a short film published on the Guggenheim's WORKS AND PROCESS YouTube channel. In this three-minute clip, Sin Wai Kin dons a rainbow-shaped moustache, their face bearing a striking resemblance to iconic filmmaker John Waters. They then lip-sync to a track that troubles the distinction between news and performance, fact and invention.

When I meet Sin Wai Kin over Zoom, they sit in front of a floor-to-ceiling mirror at home in London. The reflection revealed a reproduction of the Mona Lisa in a small gold frame, on a wall behind the screen. A print of Botticelli's THE $BIRTH\ OF\ VENUS$ was affixed nearby. As Sin Wai Kin spoke of their interests in performance, fiction and disguise, I began to think of these images as confrontations with the Western canon. In their literalised 'body' of work, paint is applied to the skin and faces are made up. When I expressed my desire for a virtual studio tour, Sin Wai Kin said there was no need: 'I carry it with me all of the time'.

Q THE WHITE REVIEW — Alongside performance and filmmaking, you also write. What comes first?

A SIN WAI KIN — All of my films and performances start with writing. Storytelling is central to my work. Some of the biggest shifts in my thinking have come from reading science fiction. Ursula Le Guin's THE DISPOSSESSED (1974) helped me imagine life outside capitalism, while THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS (1969) and Octavia E. Butler's incredible XENOGENESIS SERIES (1987-9) helped me to imagine different systems and models of gender. Samuel R. Delany's BABEL-17 (1966) showed me how language not only gives shape to thought but also shapes thought. My own writing always starts from a very personal space - I wouldn't know any other way. A few years ago, in 2018, I went on a research trip funded by the British Council to visit Octavia Butler's papers at the Huntington Library in Los Angeles. In the archive, I found a note that she'd written a small, punchy notecard to herself that said: 'The more personal, the more universal', which has stayed with me ever since.

Q THE WHITE REVIEW – Your drag persona first appeared in the film series, NARRATIVE REFLECTIONS

ON LOOKING (2016-17). The films are a set of moving images that appear static – as if in disguise as stills. Do the films reflect on a certain species of aggressive, consumptive – even greedy – looking?

A SIN WAI KIN - Those narratives, in NARRATIVE REFLECTIONS ON LOOKING, came out of the intensely personal, but also universal, experience of being looked at and consumed as an image. Each film presents a single figure in a static frame using camera movements to direct the viewer's gaze in familiar ways over feminine subjects. For years, I was obsessed by the idea of embodying a perfect image of Western femininity through drag, and so that's what NARRATIVE REFLECTIONS ON LOOKING evokes. This ideal is influenced by classic Hollywood figures such as Marilyn Monroe, Marlene Dietrich, and Veronica Lake, as well as more contemporary figures, who are in themselves iterations of that iconography, like Jessica Rabbit and Amanda Lepore. In NARRATIVE REFLECTIONS ON LOOKING, I'm participating in an iterative genealogy of images that are performed, naturalised, and then performed again in new and even more extreme ways. The images, narratives and gestures I am using don't hide the fact that they are constructed. Wig lines are visible, makeup is cartoonish, eyelashes are falling off, rhinestones are glued on, and postures are strained.

Q
THE WHITE REVIEW — You embody an exaggerated hyper-femme image, the kind associated with classical Hollywood cinema, appearing in sumptuous floor-length gowns, topped by candyfloss-textured white wigs. The viewer is hypnotised, but the gaze also feels violent. Do these idealised, aggressive images make their way into your new film, A DREAM OF WHOLENESS IN PARTS (2021)?

A SIN WAI KIN — I started writing A DREAM OF WHOLENESS IN PARTS in 2019. It was my first time making something on this scale. Up until that point, I'd only made short films, between one and seven minutes long, so it was an exciting step. I spent all of December 2020 in Taipei shooting it — I was in quarantine for the first two weeks either on Zoom for production meetings or alone with my thoughts, looking out of a

window that didn't open... But it was a useful time. I spent it finalising the characters in *A DREAM OF WHOLENESS IN PARTS*, recording and memorising the voiceovers for lip-syncs, refining the script. This film brings together new characters and faces that I've been developing over the past year, inspired by Taoist philosophy, Peking and Cantonese opera, as well as personal transformations – which are finally brought together in this universe.

Q
THE WHITE REVIEW — What is that universe? Do you want to capture the viewer in your world, just as you've been immersed in science fiction?

SIN WAI KIN - The narrative of A DREAM OF WHOLENESS IN PARTS is non-linear. As with some of my previous works, I wanted to create a 'carrier bag' narrative, after Ursula Le Guin's essay THE CARRIER BAG THEORY OF FICTION (1986) - an immersive space where many things are held together for consideration, without the need to be questioned and resolved. A DREAM OF WHOLENESS IN PARTS is influenced by the Taoist allegory, Chuang Tzu's DREAM OF THE BUTTERFLY (c. 300 BC). In the allegory, a philosopher wakes up from a vivid dream, in which he's been a butterfly, only to find that he is no longer sure which state of consciousness is true. My film contains seven dreams that I wanted to function in the same way as Tzu's allegory. The characters move through a dreamscape, waking up from each consecutive dream, feeling unsure about where reality lies. The film, which will be premiered as part of the British Art Show 9 this year, will be installed on an infinite loop, so there is no determined beginning or ending, but rather a self-contained universe.

Q
THE WHITE REVIEW — Who are the characters in the dreamscape? Do their bodies shift and alter, too, according to the landscapes they move through?

A SIN WAI KIN — There are two – arguably three – main characters who exist in relationship to one another: The Universe and The Construct. Both characters expand on gender and racial binaries that I've been deconstructing in the past few years. The

Universe is a masculine character, inspired in part by Tony Leung Ka-fai – a hero in classic Hong Kong cinema – and the Zing (warrior) role, which is an archetype from Peking and Cantonese opera. Traditionally the warrior is very pictorial in terms of makeup, and in my film the face of The Universe is also elaborate. His hair is blue and his eyelids are painted to evoke the leaves of a flower, which blossoms over a third eye that's painted on his forehead. The flower takes root around The Universe's mouth and beyond the flower is a planetary system. During The Universe's dreams, he finds himself strangely reflected in his surroundings: a tree and a bowl of wonton noodles are animated to speak back to him, and sometimes to speak as him. Through blurring and reflections, I wanted to break down the binary of subject and object, individual and context.

The second character, The Construct, takes influence from a feminine archetype in Cantonese opera (the Daan role). In my film The Construct wears a suit with matching chopines - which are these insane platform shoes, popular in the 15th century... (I imagine these shoes on a character from an inter-planetary version of THE REAL HOUSEWIVES). The Construct also wears a long wig made from my own hair, which I cut off last year as part of a personal transformation. The wig is a work in its own right, called COSTUME FOR DREAMING (2021), which will be shown in relationship to the film. There are arguably three characters, because The Construct has a second self who is almostidentical - the two selves have the same hair and clothes, but a different face. One face is painted blue and pink with eyebrows angled up towards the centre of the face, in a demure expression. Another is green and pink, with evebrows angled down towards the centre of the face, in what could be seen as a menacing expression. Both are interpretations of the Daan role, and in Peking opera the colour combinations are symbolic. Blue and pink mean loyalty and honour. Green and pink signify cruelty, vanity or selfishness.

Q
THE WHITE REVIEW — Have you watched a lot of
Cantonese opera? Have you seen any live shows?

A SIN WAI KIN — I have seen some Peking opera as an adult, but I encountered a lot of Cantonese opera growing up. My grandmother was a huge Cantonese opera fan; any free time she had was spent in front of her TV with a microphone, singing along

with her favourite actors. This would happen karaoke-style at home or sometimes she would bring me to the local community centre with her friends where they met and sang for each other, usually as an informal activity. Her favourite actors were Yam Kim-fai and Bak Sheut-sin, two women who often played romantic lead roles opposite each other. This has definitely been in my consciousness for a long time as an example of queerness in Chinese culture. My grandmother didn't see it that way, of course, but for me it was absolutely that.

Q
THE WHITE REVIEW — Are there any other proto-queer elements to Cantonese opera? Is there a sense of gender as performance?

A SIN WAI KIN — There are four different roles in Cantonese opera. The Sang character is the male lead and the Daan character is the female lead; the Sang and Daan are often romantically related. Then you have the Zing (warrior) role, where the face becomes pictorial through makeup. Next you have the Cau role, which is the clown role, often presented as a foil, offering comic relief to the production. Each category is distinct and there is so much skill and craft in terms of the clothing, the makeup, the gestures and vocalisations. For me, these traditional opera archetypes have become a perfect way to talk about predetermined societal scripts. By reimagining these characters and presenting them in new ways, I'm trying to unpick and reassemble these scripts.

THE WHITE REVIEW — Lip-syncing features across your work, in performances like *A VIEW FROM*ELSEWHERE (2019) as well as films, undermining the connection between what's seen and heard. Do you see it as another way of unpicking the script?

A SIN WAI KIN — I use lip-syncing in my drag performances, always to pre-recorded tracks. I think lip-syncing is an amazing queer technology of embodiment. When you are taking on a voice and energy, the result is often uncanny. I think this is why we're so obsessed with it in queer culture. You become a fantasy. For me, lip-syncing is so interesting because embodying a voice is

something so different to embodying a person in image, with wigs, make up and so on. I use lip-syncing to create a disconnect between the speaker and what's being said, even though the voice is always my own. I do this to shift the relationship between subject and language, to question where a voice or idea comes from and create ambiguity in the directions and perspectives of the speaker and the listener.

THE WHITE REVIEW — In your recent film, TOTAL FABRICATION, which was published online in the midst of a global pandemic, you perform a character who is ostensibly more mase than previous characters. They wear a white collared shirt and have short, curtained hair. There is lip-syncing, but this time to a significantly lower pitched voice. Why did you decide to embody a mase character in this performance?

A DREAM OF WHOLENESS IN PARTS, and it was my first time experimenting with masculinity in drag, which is something that I've wanted to do for a long time. The lockdown provided unexpected time to stop and think about the direction I want my work to go in. Compared to my usual drag looks, TOTAL FABRICATION was a small gesture, but it was the first time I've dealt with masculinity explicitly in my work. My feminine characters are always over the top, but my relationship to masculinity is a little different. Suddenly, it was not about taking something off, but rather trying something on. From a cultural perspective, so often masculinity is equated with an absence of performance, and thus seen as a site of authenticity and authority. TOTAL FABRICATION makes fun of that.

Q
THE WHITE REVIEW — The audio track of TOTAL
FABRICATION was taken from an American TV-show from
the late 1990s, called BEYOND BELIEF: FACT OR
FICTION. Why did you choose these clips as a starting place?

A SIN WAI KIN — I remember watching BEYOND BELIEF growing up. It was hosted by Jonathan Frakes, of STAR TREK fame. By this point in his career, Frakes was a little bit older but still very much trying to personify a suave TV

host. Each episode featured a dramatised narrative with actors playing out supernatural happenstances. The audience were asked to spend the show guessing whether the events actually took place, or whether they're totally made up. At the end of the show, Frakes came out and revealed to viewers whether the dramatised narrative was fact or fiction.

TOTAL FABRICATION plays into the importance of storytelling in the distinction between objective and subjective knowledge.

Storytelling is a human technology of knowledge and truth production. Whether it's history, religion or science, it matters who the author is – because every author will bring unconscious bias and perspectives to a narrative, even within something as supposedly infallible as scientific process.

O
THE WHITE REVIEW — The tension between fact, fiction and the news is also present in TODAY'S TOP STORIES. In this short film, you play a newsreader with blue skin: your face is the centre of a supernova, and a pulsating blue planet fills the backdrop behind. Did this piece come out of concerns around that Trumpian term, fake news?

A SIN WAI KIN — Like TOTAL FABRICATION, TODAY'S TOP STORIES is also concerned with the technology of storytelling. The male protagonist, who is a newsreader, is called The Storyteller. Across the film, he tells you one thing and then tells you the exact opposite, broadcasting from an unstable universe in outer space. The blue planet behind him is actually an imploding star that bursts with lightning, as if on the verge of change or collapse. There are other stars too, which linger nearby, glitching. In making the film, I was thinking though that totally pathetic, frustrated feeling I have when watching the news, knowing I'm being manipulated. I watched a lot of newsreaders to prepare, as I thought about how to embody The Storyteller gesturally. In the film, he rotates on his chair to face other camera angles as news readers do, but he always glitches back to the same perspective.

 ${f Q}$ THE WHITE REVIEW — After over a year of isolation, I think we're all feeling a new investment in togetherness. Your long-term, ongoing project $DREAM\ BABES$ is a collective that

hosts workshops, talks and events, offering a lifeline to artists working outside, or beyond, the institution. *DREAM BABES* have screened sci-fi porn movies, hosted performances, and hold a regular science group. What's it like to work with other people?

A SIN WAI KIN — Collaboration has always been really important in my work. DREAM BABES was born out of a need to connect and foster community with other people with queer intersectional experience who were using science fiction to try to imagine something better. I really believe that the task of imaging another, or better world is better achieved by collaboration with other people. Every aspect of DREAM BABES was collaborative. The beauty of collaboration is that you make something with someone else that you would not have been able to do on your own.

THE WHITE REVIEW — Your works include so many characters, from The Storyteller and The Universe to the drag personae in your live performances. Do you regard your work as a kind of collective in itself: each work a character with its own personality and lineage?

SIN WAI KIN - Somebody once said to me: 'Every work that you make reveals a new part of a universe'. That's really what it feels like. Even if one work might just recount the first time I saw queer porn, another the story of how deep-sea anglerfish mate or another how neuroplasticity isn't considered enough in brain research. These are all examples from different parts in A VIEW FROM ELSEWHERE, a work in which I'm holding all of these things together, in a sort of Le Guin carrier bag, and asking the viewer to consider the relationship between each thing. It's through my work that I've made huge personal discoveries. Through the act of drag - which is a really purposeful putting on and taking off - I came to the realisation that I wasn't a woman. Over time, the line between life and performance has also blurred. The 'taking off' has become part of the performance – such as in my facial wipe works, where I capture the expressions I've painted onto my face with wet wipes. Here, I wanted to draw attention to the ephemeral aspects of performance, and also to call into question the imagined line between authenticity and performance. My life leaks onto the stage, too - I'm thinking of the wig that The

Construct wears in A DREAM OF WHOLENESS IN PARTS, the one made out of my own hair, in the style I wore it as a femme-identified person. I see my name change in this vein too. It's not that one thing is a performance and the other thing isn't a performance. I'm trying to live and make work in a way that draws attention to how, like the gender binary, performance versus authenticity is another false dichotomy.

THE WHITE REVIEW — The imprints on your wet wipe works reveal a deeply personal relationship between a person's face, their identity, and how they care for it. The technique you've developed – carefully pressing your face against a wet wipe, in lieu of the blank canvas – breathes new life into characters familiar from your performances, but with new expressions. By displaying these works, separate but in connection to your performances, are you suggesting identity as a kind of craft?

SIN WAI KIN - Every time I paint a face, I convey an emotion or mood relevant to a piece. I can paint a face that appears to be scowling when my muscles are relaxed. When I take it off, the wet wipe holds that permanent scowl. The wipe works are so intimate, not just because they have been pressed to my face, but also because they contain bits of myself: my skin and sweat parts of the body that are often considered abject once they come off you. I think of the wipes as death masks, and they function as an archive of all the different roles I've taken on, all the embodiments. Creating an archive is especially important to performance, which is such an ephemeral medium. The archive holds the classic 'Victoria Sin' character face, which was my first and embody that character, it changes my relationship with my body. And when I take that embodiment off, I don't just change back. The relationships between myself and my audience, or my THE OPERA - from later performance works. Then there are The Construct's two faces: one in blue and pink, the other in green and yellow. I've also archived the faces of The Universe, The Storyteller, and most recently faces of The Clown, which, like The Construct, has two versions. There are faces I am working on that don't even have names yet. Each wipe is unique, whether I make them after a performances, or as part of the process of character development. Even wipes carrying the same face are never the same, because I paint the faces differently each time, to suit

specific performances. What's more, the wipes capture the make up, but also the expression made by my face beneath, which mixes with the painted character to form the final imprint.

Q
THE WHITE REVIEW — Each wipe shows a character with their eyes shut – since your eyes need to be in order to remove eye makeup – which gives them kind of finality. Has the process of making the wipes changed your own relationship with your face?

A SIN WAI KIN — Every time I put on a face, look at myself and embody that character, it changes my relationship with my body. And when I take that embodiment off, I don't just change back. The relationships between myself and my audience, or my body and I, has changed me in some way – given me a new perspective and license to be something else. To see existing parts of myself in a new way.

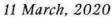
ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTOR

O. H. FLETCHER is a writer of fiction and non-fiction. She has worked collaboratively with artists and gallerists in London and the US. In 2017, she was Writer-in-Residence at Rule Gallery, Marfa, Texas, where she worked on a text exploring an archival exhibition of artists involved in Drop City, 1965–71, an artist's commune based in Trinidad, Colorado.

SIN WAI KIN (fka Victoria Sin) is an artist using speculative fiction within performance, moving image, writing and print to interrupt normative processes of desire, identification, and objectification. In 2020, Wai Kin opened the solo exhibition NARRATIVE REFLECTIONS ON LOOKING at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Zagreb, Croatia. In 2021, the artist will be included in the touring exhibition BRITISH ART SHOW 9.

Victoria Sin: "I'm trying to break down the binary of thinking and feeling"

The multimedia artist is exploding the artifice of white femininity and critiquing established notions of language and identity using film, photography, drag, scifi, fanzines and Cantonese opera, writes Lola Olufemi



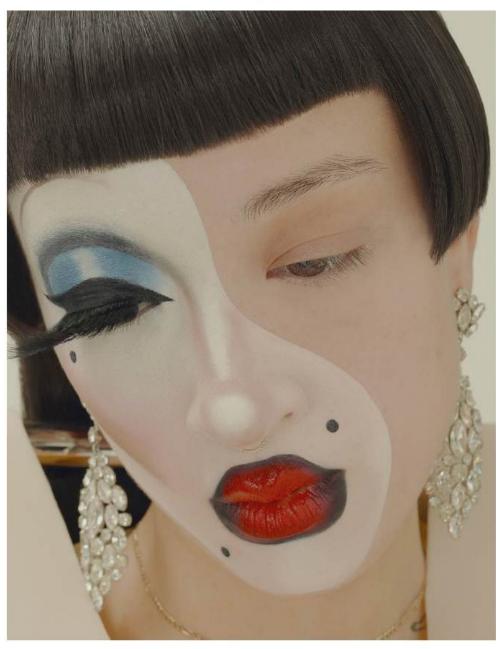


Photo: Nhu Xuan Hua.

Sleek, 2020

Victoria Sin is trying something new. I meet the 29-year-old Canadian-born artist – known for their use of performance, film and speculative fiction to deconstruct the limits of the body – at the studio they share with their partner and collaborator, Shy One. They make their living as an artist in London, widely recognised for their distinctive approach to questions of identification. In recent years, they have exhibited work at the Museum of Contemporary Art Toronto Canada, the Hayward Gallery, the Whitechapel Gallery, the 2019 Venice Biennale, Palais de Tokyo, the Serpentine Galleries, the Taipei Contemporary Art Center, Art Basel Hong Kong, the ICA, Block Universe and the Tate Modern, among others.

For Sin, queer kinship and community birthed their practice; it offered a myriad of alternative possibilities and new ways of being. At 18, they moved to London, attempting to escape the naming and policing of their body, a theme that recurs throughout their work. "Drag shows were the first time I saw this empowered embodiment of queer femininity ... I used to live across the street from Vogue Fabrics in Dalston, London. The community there allowed drag to be whatever you wanted it to be. That was new for me, I was used to more traditional drag shows dominated by cis white men performing an idea of womanhood back in Toronto. When I moved to London, suddenly drag was dressing up like a green monster, or a bin bag."



SHIRT AND NECKLACE: Christian Dior UNDERWEAR: La Perla SHOES: WESTERN AFFAIR

Queer nightlife in London provided the opportunity to play, a space where 'weirdos' could experiment. Having been obsessed with the artifice of Western femininity, Sin sought to burst it open by using drag to pick apart the fantasy image of femininity that dictates gendered social scripts. "If you were assigned female at birth, or you present as feminine now, you've been measured against an ideal image of femininity ... Growing up, every image of femininity was skinny, white, cookie cutter. I was obsessed with that and old Hollywood versions of it. A lot of my early drag was trying to attain this 'moving goalpost' ideal of Western femininity. I was trying to embody and explode this image of white femininity, to say, 'Look, I can do it and *it's not real.*"

Sin's art is seductive. Their fantasy images – contained in works such as *Preface/Looking Without Touching* (2017) and *She Postures in Context* (2018) – invite you in, exposing the mechanisms that shame and police non-normative desire. Their work explores the failure of heterosexuality: the audience is made aware that what they are viewing is an elaborate construction, but Sin demands they grapple with their attraction to fantasy. "The sexuality in my work didn't occur to me until people started pointing it out. There is something that has to do with the fact that I am a person who was socialised as a woman, who is also attracted to femininity. Do I want to be this image or do I want to fuck this image? That's a big question in dyke culture, and a complex relationship to navigate."



JACKET: Versace JEWELLERY: Artist's own.

"For me, it was eye-opening to be able to become this fantasy embodiment because suddenly people didn't know what was underneath."

But the fantasy also had very real consequences for how Sin moved through the world, demonstrating further that the body is merely a way to be read, providing safety and disguise for some, and proximity to violence for others. "In a Western context, the way I am sexualised is also racialised. That's a disgusting feeling. For me, it was eyeopening to be able to become this fantasy embodiment because suddenly people didn't know what was underneath. People would assume I was a cis white guy and they started treating me differently. I was in clubs and people would move out of my way." In an increasingly reactionary and hostile environment in which gender binaries are being reinscribed and trans life presented as a threat, Sin's work helps us understand the fluidity of gender and the elaborate ruse of identity, illustrating how easily the body is able to morph and transform.

The defining quality of Sin's work is constant reinvention. In line with their intention to disrupt and confuse normative processes, they refuse singular and categorical approaches to their practice. Their interests have always been multiple, and this is demonstrated in the breadth of their artwork. They are many things at once: a visual and moving image artist, a drag performer, a curator, a zine editor and a speculative fiction writer.



The interdiscipliary nature of their work is evidenced by the fact that it can be found in DIY nightclubs (Sin has performed at many queer and lesbian nights as a drag queen), emerging feminist literary festivals such as London's New Suns festival, as well as immersive live performance pieces in established art contexts - the Venice Biennale, the Tate and Sotheby's, for example. Sin is a shapeshifter and as their artistic practice has developed, so have their interests. "Recently, I've been moving away from trying to be this perfect embodiment of Western femininity. I've done that. What do I want to do now? I've been exploring the way drag exists in Cantonese opera, reimagining the visual language and aesthetics of what a queer sci-fi Cantonese opera would look and feel like." Intensely aware of their audience, they refuse to "perform ethnicity" for a white-dominated art world, seeking instead to denaturalise the language of identity, revealing it for what it is, a pattern, a code. In If I had the words to tell you we wouldn't be here now (2019), an extended performance staged at the Venice Biennale as well as Tapei's Chi-Wen gallery, Sin lip syncs to their own musings on the limits of linguistic expression (they call language and naming "an act of mastery").

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"I keep on coming back to language in my performances and in my writing, I'm running in circles with it a little bit. There's an impossibility of deconstructing language using language, but what other tools do we have? Our brains function through pattern recognition, so categorisation is inherent in language. I'm trying to figure out the ways we can transcend how language makes us think of ourselves in the world." We agree that the density of the English language and its violent histories make it impossible to articulate the process they are trying to describe. In order to describe it, we'd need to invent new methods of communication. For Sin, in the absence of that articulation, feeling serves as a means of conveying what could be. Feeling is evoked in their elaborate creation of immersive environments. In And at the pinnacle the foot of a mountain (2019), a 23-minute soundscape presented last au-

tumn at Sheffield's Site Gallery, Sin attempts to rewrite the future through the use of futuristic storytelling animated by atmospheric sound. "Sound has its own kind of language. It's a language that doesn't need words and that rubs against categorisation. It's able to express emotion more fluently than language can. I'm trying to break down the binary of thinking and feeling."



TOP AND SHORTS: Prada SHOES: Artist's own

Sin's desire to help their audience escape reality is a result of their interest in science fiction as well as their desire to unravel the dominant narratives that define the way we live. "People like Ursula le Guin, Samuel Delany, Octavia Butler ... They are the people I always come back to. The most important thing for me is that science fiction can ask the question, 'What if?'. What if things were different? What if I was different? What if things don't

change? That science fiction can do this and also immerse you in an experience of what it would feel like to live in that world is vital when we're living in a world where man-made narratives are altering our minds every day in really violent ways." They consider their practice to be a continuation of a science fiction legacy. This interest led them to edit science fiction zines Dream Babes 1 and 2.0, inviting authors and artists Samuel Delany and Shu Lea Cheang, Xia Jia and Sophia Al-Maria to contribute. Critical science fiction allowed them to develop new ideas, defining the purpose of performance. "These performances where there are costumes and narratives and sound design and lighting design ... I'm trying to use every theatrical device at my disposal to try and give you an idea of what it feels like in this world that I want to make and be in." Sin believes that science fiction can also help us talk about and think through sex. Inspired by the work of director Eric Pussyboy and artist Shu Lea Cheang, whose 2017 film, Fluidø, imagined a post-HIV/AIDS future, Sin sees the potential for science fiction to combat and abolish the biological essentialism that plagues our understandings of gender, nature, pornography and desire.

What's next? Sin is busy preparing for a performance at the Guggenheim in New York later this year, and is excited about the new direction their work is taking. Whether drag performance, moving image, soundscaping or science fiction storytelling, their work demands to be witnessed. "It becomes incredibly important to understand the process of narrative-building as it exists around us in history, religion, science, the news, and then to write new narratives. Writing speculative fiction is that one extra step, I know that all of this isn't real. So I'm just going to write the narratives that I want to be in." They invite us to recognise the narratives that shape our lives, and begin to unravel them.

All photography by Nhu Xuan Hua.
Hair Stylist: Tomomi Roppongi @ Saint Luke Artists using
EVO Hair
Set Designer: Paulina Piiponen
Photographer Assistant: Anna Sophia John
Stylist Assistant: Pierre Alexandre Fillaire
Hair stylist assistant: Charles Stanley

The Art Newspaper, 2020

Top Shanghai nightclub throws postpandemic party with video art

THE ART NEWSPAPER
28th May 2020 11:40 GMT



Victoria Sin courtesy the artist

Among the many cultural venues struggling to stay afloat after several months' Covid lockdown. Shanghai's beloved independent nightclub All has gone make-orbreak for May, with a frantic events lineup that included a two-night exhibition of video art influenced by club life. Organised by the Shanghai-based writer and curator Alvin Li, the show ran on 13 and 14 May featuring nine artists including Victoria Sin, Tao Hui, Kenneth Tam and Chen Tianzhuo, who also performed at All with his Asian Dope Boys on 9 May. Though All only opened in 2017, its predecessor Shelter was a decade-long institution in Shanghai, and its affiliated label SVBKVLT "managed to hone a soundscape that is distinctly their own and that has come to inspire many artists working here," Li says. All is as among the "very few spaces where visual and sound artists intersect" and crucially "the go-to place for young artists to explore more experimental modes of artistic expression," he adds. The All or Nothing series of artistic offerings also included a performance by local experimental dance troupe In The Flesh on 27 May. Li says his project came together in three weeks, with screens loaned from Antenna Space and Chronus Art Center.

Elephant, 2019

The 2010s: The Artists Who Defined the Decade

The Elephant team, contributors and friends of the magazine reveal their artists of the decade, with personal reflections on the radical shifts and emerging voices of the last ten years.



Victoria Sin, A View From Elsewhere, 2018. Performance part of Meetings on Art, 58th Venice Biennale, 2019. Credit Riccardo Banfi. Courtesy Delfina Foundation and Arts Council England

Victoria Sin

Locking eyes with Victoria Sin is like being hit by a bolt of lightning. The performance artist uses the principles of drag to build an alluring hyper-feminized persona of dramatic proportions: big hair, big boobs, big lashes. But Sin's image is far more than a caricature. They use this carefully crafted image to question issues of gender, femininity, sexuality and language. It feels like their work is right at the forefront of a new way of seeing the world, one that questions how you look, how you speak—even how you breathe.

Chosen by Holly Black, editor at large at Elephant

Drag Is a Mirror

Victoria Sin's hybrid practice uses speculative fiction to disrupt normative ways of desiring, looking and existing



Victoria Sin, *Illocutionary Utterances* (installation view), 2018. In "Age of You," MOCA Toronto, 2019. Photo: Tom Arban Photography Inc.

Toronto-born artist <u>Victoria Sin</u> has been based in London, UK, for the past decade, where they rose up through experimental and non-binary drag circuits, alongside a burgeoning art practice. During the completion of their MA at the Royal College of Art and in the few years since graduating, Sin's incorporation of drag into their art practice—which includes moving image, music, original writing and collaborations—is balanced by a careful, intentional refusal of being consumed easily, especially by straight audiences. Their use, exaggeration and transformation of hyper-feminine codes questions ideal images in systems of looking and representation.

Sin has rapidly gained momentum in art contexts, in the past year exhibiting at Chi-Wen Gallery in Taipei, Palais de Tokyo in Paris and the 58th Venice Biennale, as well as hosting the <u>Serpentine Gallery's</u> podcast in London.

This fall, Sin's works are presented in Montreal's MOMENTA Biennale de l'image and MOCA Toronto's exhibition "Age of You," curated by Shumon Basar, Douglas Coupland and Hans Ulrich Obrist. Erin Reznick, co-creator of <u>PHILE Magazine</u>, sat down with Sin ahead of the opening of "Age of You" to reflect on the driving forces of their rich speculations.



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Victoria Sin, *Tell me everything you saw, and what you think it means* (still), 2018. Single-channel 4K video, 5 min 38 sec. Courtesy the artist/Chi-Wen Gallery.

Erin Reznick: How does it feel to be back in Toronto?

Victoria Sin: It's a bit weird to be honest. All of my adult life has been in London so whenever I come back to Canada, to Toronto specifically, I revert back to a teenage mindset—I don't really know how to adult here. This trip is the first time that I'm coming back in a professional context, to show at MOCA and to be part of MOMENTA. It means a lot to me.

ER: How did drag come into your life?

VS: Drag came into my life in Toronto. I was 17 and gay and I used to go to bars on Church Street, Woody's specifically. Those shows were where I really fell in love with both my queer identity and drag because that was the first time I saw this super empowered embodiment of femininity that was being used to take up space. That was completely mesmerizing for me. At that point I didn't really realize that I wanted to be a drag queen because I didn't know that was possible, but I was completely obsessed. That carried over into London where I then met a drag scene that was more open. It wasn't about trying to perfectly impersonate an idea of what a woman was. It was just about playing with identity constructs. You know, you could do drag as a monster or a bin bag.

ER: When you first started experimenting with drag, did you know you wanted to incorporate it into an art practice?

VS: No, I started doing drag around the time of my undergrad, but [art and drag] were completely separate things. Drag was a secret desire for me. It was something I felt strongly about and also felt was really precious. I was nervous about bringing it into an art context because the drag scene that I was part of was really focused around intersectional marginalized communities, and the art world usually isn't.

ER: You now operate in the art world and in a traditional drag circuit, which are very different audiences. How would you describe the difference ways you control your image between these two communities?

VS: Well, my performances in a queer context are more fun. They're to entertain people. I think working in art contexts has opened up a lot for me in terms of my drag because it's where I started writing, and playing purely with images. In an art context, I can perform an hourlong piece of writing and also have the audience look at me standing still for five minutes. It invites a different kind of contemplation. People are looking in order to be critical, and also to be entertained a little bit, whereas in a queer cabaret context, people are there to be entertained, and maybe be a little bit critical. People are there for completely different reasons, so I have to be mindful of that.

I've been operating less in drag contexts recently because I've been interested in making pieces that are not just five-to-ten-minute numbers. I've been getting more in depth about writing pieces that are more like speculative fiction, and bringing in things that require much bigger budgets, like theatrical devices, costumes, lighting and instrumentalists. It is really exciting but I will never look down on the drag context I came from, because that was where these ideas and passions were born.



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Victoria Sin, Part Three/Cthulhu Through the Looking Glass chapter (still, detail) from Narrative Reflections on Looking, 2017. Digital video, 11 min overall. Courtesy the artist/Chi-Wen Gallery and MOMENTA.

For me, drag is embodied speculative fiction. I think the most important thing about science fiction is that it asks the question, "What if?"

ER: There is an inherent link between queerness and speculative fiction because it uses ideas of the future to reflect on contemporary reality and its alternatives. How does science fiction inform your drag?

VS: For me, drag is embodied speculative fiction. I think the most important thing about science fiction is that it asks the question, "What if?" Drag does that in the same way. Science fiction and speculative fiction have informed my work so much because drag was

the first time I was able to step outside of myself. By looking completely different and being able to occupy a completely different, exaggerated positionality, I was able to experience how people treated me differently. So I acted differently. This act of continually putting on and occupying a different position changed not only my ideas about my gender and practice, but myself. It was through this process that I realized I was non-binary. It's not just that science fiction had an influence on my practice; it's become my practice.



Victoria Sin, *Preface/Looking Without Touching* chapter (still, detail) from *Narrative Reflections on Looking*, 2017. Digital video, 11 min overall. Courtesy the artist/Chi-Wen Gallery and MOMENTA.

ER: Speculative fiction uses aliens as "other," but places them in a world where they are the majority. This has me thinking about what your relationship is to "other" because you straddle so many cultural lines. You're a mixed-race, expatriate, non-binary, assigned-female-at-birth drag queen, and I think your drag performance is a physical representation of that straddle. Does that in-between place have a correlation with creativity?

VS: Definitely. Being somewhere in between, not really being able to locate myself in so many different areas of my life, has really informed my work. It's made me see that gender is a construct, that nationality is a construct, and that these in-between positions are a lot about uncertainty and being comfortable with not knowing. Humans are animals that really love to be certain about things, that love to be able to draw a line around something and say, "This is what I am, this is what you are." So to be able to say "No, I am neither of those things" has been something I've struggled with, but I've realized it's a very important act. I try to write from a non-binary, "othered" position in all senses. I'm not trying to claim anything, I'm just trying to show the audience that their positions are maybe not what they think they are.

The performance I'm doing in November at MOCA is a performance I did at the Venice Biennale and at Chi-Wen Gallery. It's a performance that's basically a duet with an instrumentalist. Every time I perform it, I work with a different instrumentalist and instrument. It's about language, which is of course a category-producing technology. When you are speaking, you are naming things, and when you're naming things, you are creating delineations of what things are and aren't. The performance is about the difficulty of naming, of this double-edged sword. It's often violent to name things but also liberating to be able to name yourself. But by naming yourself, you are still creating a line, saying, "This is what I am"; it becomes incredibly difficult to step outside of that. In my performance, a name is replaced by a musical note or musical sentence. It creates a blank space that is not so easily categorized and is much more emotional.

It's about language, which is of course a category-producing technology...The performance is about the difficulty of naming, of this double-edged sword.

ER: You're also releasing music later this year with **Shy One**. What is that project like?

VS: They're mostly projects we've been working on together, essentially my texts with her music. Working with Shy One has been amazing because she's also my girlfriend, so some of the texts are about her. They are really intimate, and some are super sexual. The way that she's built the tracks are really personal and I think that's apparent when you listen to them.

ER: What's it like hearing her reaction to your work through music?

VS: Incredible. That's why I fell in love with her. When we first started hanging out, I sent her a few things that I had written and recorded. She sent them back to me as full songs, and the way she had interpreted my words and created layers and textures completely brought it alive. I thought, "If this is how you understand my work, I just want to hang out with you all the time. In every sense."

ER: When is the album coming out?

VS: We don't have a date yet. We are working on something right now with Yaeji that will be released on her next mixtape, which I think will come out in the next few months.

ER: It must be liberating to explore so many different mediums.

VS: Definitely, I have learned so much from the different musicians I've worked with. I'm really interested in the way that music and sound bring emotion and nuance to my work. I want to use every kind of theatrical or filmic technology I can to create worlds that people can be completely immersed in.



Victoria Sin, If I had the words to tell you we wouldn't be here now (performance documentation), 2019, at Chi-Wen Gallery, Taipei. Photo: Ivy Tzai. Courtesy the artist/Chi-Wen Gallery.

ER: What would you say to someone entering the world of experimental drag?

VS: I think it would depend on where they are, because if you're in a small town or if you're in a global centre, getting into drag—especially experimental drag—can be really difficult. In some places, it can be dangerous. Drag is so much about the person; every drag artist is completely unique and does it for different reasons.

ER: Then what would you say to someone who's seeing experimental drag for the first time?

VS: I would say be open and consider it. Consider what this means to the person doing it, and also the people who are watching it. I think one of the best things about drag is that it's a mirror. Don't make immediate judgments. Take time to reflect on it, and use it to reflect on yourself.

Victoria Sin will perform If I had the words to tell you we wouldn't be here now at MOCA Toronto for "Age of You" on November 28 with percussionist Nikki Joshi. The exhibition is on until January 5, 2020.





Victoria Sin *The sky as an image, an image as a net*, 2018
Serpentine Galleries

Victoria Sin develops performances, films, texts, and installations that delve into gender, harnessing science-fiction themes to imagine alternate societal norms. Sin began performing at the London nightclub Vogue Fabrics in Dalston in 2013. Since then, they've captured the attention of the art world.



In 2018, Sin, who shows with Taipei's Chi-Wen Gallery, performed at the Serpentine Galleries and opened a solo show at Sotheby's S|2 gallery. At S|2, the artist's written speculative fiction accompanied videos and tactile works—tissues imprinted with the remnants of their performance makeup. The artist has said that drag helped them understand their own place in the intricate complexities of gender identity.





Victoria Sin

The sky as an image, an image as a net, 2018

Serpentine Galleries

On loan

This year, Sin has performed and displayed their work on prominent artworld stages including the Venice Biennale, Art Basel in Hong Kong, Whitechapel Gallery, Hayward Gallery, and the Palais de Tokyo. Hayward curator Vincent Honoré, who included

Sin in the group show "Kiss My Genders," said that by deconstructing archetypal feminine beauties—spanning Hollywood to cartoons—Sin "argues for a non-binary and post-colonial alternative." The artist asserts, Honoré continued, "that 'gender is something that can be played with, rather than something to measure people against.' By doing so, [they offer] a visual feast and a sharp criticism of images and clichés' circulation."

Art in America, 2019

SONGS IN THE GARDEN: PERFORMANCE AT THE 58TH VENICE BIENNALE

By Elizabeth Fullerton May 20, 2019 11:19am

Nonbinary drag queen Victoria Sin presented If I had the words to tell you we wouldn't be here now (2019) in the Arsenale's Giardino delle Vergini, with a haunting musical accompaniment by Matteo Gemolo on a traverso, or baroque flute. Wearing a red dress with a plunging neckline, towering heels, and a platinum wig, Sin lipsynched and enacted a monologue about language's limited expressive capabilities, unpacking the ways in which words and names are used to define and contain individuals within social constructs. "I want to use words to tell you that I am more than you could say because you have not been given the words to describe how multiple your selves are," the artist said, moving their lips to their prerecorded voice. As they described their character's family history and the shaping of their identity through a discussion of places and experiences, Sin would occasionally pause to allow a mournful musical passage to stand in for an idea impossible to express in language. The work is a layered series of duets and dialogues: between performer and instrumentalist, between Sin's monologue and a voice-over suggesting the subconscious, between Gemolo's live improvisations and a recording of him playing a composition he wrote (both of which riffed on the music of Wilhelm Friedemann Bach). This slippery form complemented its theme of unstable selfhood.

Victoria Sin

In Conversation with Himali Singh Soin London, 11 January 2019



Victoria Sin, *The sky as an image, an image as a net* (2018). Performance at Park Nights 2018, Serpentine Galleries, London (13 July 2018). Courtesy the artist and Serpentine Galleries. Photo: Lewis Ronald.

If a multiplicity of being can be truly embodied, Victoria Sin comes close. Sin's practice spans performance, moving image and writing, with the artist adopting personas in their work that are multiple, and thematics that are intersectional. With a master's in Print from the Royal College of Art, a programme that

examines the digital circulation of the image and its multitude of connotations, Sin's work focuses on speculative ideas surrounding the body, gender, and methods of decolonisation, using drag as a means of engagement.

To say Sin dresses in drag is an understatement. Rather, they embody drag's complex histories in order to embody transformation itself. Whether in performances staged at art institutions around the world, including the Taipei Contemporary Art Center and London's <u>Institute of Contemporary Art</u>, or in documentation published on their Instagram account, Sin's sensual use of clothing and makeup—face powder, fake eyelashes, exaggerated bow lips, giant silicone breasts, and pewter wigs—creates a layer of separation from the viewer. Erotic poses become serious parodies: a formal manifestation of the construction of gender and cultural identity. Irresistible images force the viewer to look, then re-look, until they are left looking at themselves; something that comes across in their current show at Sotheby's S|2, Narrative Reflections on Looking (23 November 2018-25 January 2019), for which a series of short film works narrate fantasy meetings in a lush, low voice.



Victoria Sin, Narrative Reflections on Looking (2016-2017). Courtesy the artist.

Sin describes their use of science fiction in both performance and writing as 'a practice of rewriting patriarchal and colonial narratives naturalised by scientific and historical discourses on states of sexed, gendered and raced bodies'. Their ongoing project *Dream Babes*, first staged in collaboration with Auto Italia South East (2016) and now an independent project funded by Live Art UK, involves reading groups, a zine, and a live programme exploring 'science and speculative fiction as a productive strategy of queer resistance, imaging futurity that does not depend on existing historical and social infrastructure.'

Dream Babes invites participants to enter a zone where bodies are amorphous and images are not easily readable. Throughout, ideas unravel slowly through discourse, while paying tribute to the Afrofuturists and Cyberfeminists, whose interpretations of space produced radical and welcoming sites for alienated bodies.



Victoria Sin, Narrative Reflections on Looking (2016-2017). Courtesy the artist.

In performance and in writing, Sin's references to their Asian background displace the physical, social, and technological body; re-organising experience so that the voices of the absurd, forgotten, and silenced are heightened, given revised focus, and seen in a new light. These references are made explicit in the artist's upcoming performance in <u>Taipei</u>, *If I had the* words to tell you we wouldn't be here now (2019), which will be staged on 16 January as part of Su Misu's solo exhibition at Chi-Wen Gallery, I am a fake but my heart is true, Part II (12 January-28 February 2019). The intervention questions the role of language in the reproduction of identity categories through an engagement with the Cantonese opera VHS tapes that they listened to as a child with their grandmother, in which female actors would play both halves of a romantic couple.

There is, of course, a concrete vision that underlies Sin's projects, as expressed in the artist's upcoming show with Sophia Al-Maria at Whitechapel Gallery in London, BCE (15 January–28 April 2019). In a new film

collaboration, Al-Maria invited Sin to write and perform an apocalyptic creation myth to camera that is hopeful for a better future; something Sin discusses in this conversation, among other projects.



Victoria Sin, Narrative Reflections on Looking (2016-2017). Courtesy the artist.

The first narratives in my work came from looking at some experimental footage I had shot of my drag persona in the RCA Moving Image Studio for several weeks. At some point something clicked, and I wrote something which connected the experience of looking at images of my drag character, and the experience of looking at ideal images of girls and women in teen magazines as a preteen. Both are experiences of looking at constructed ideal images; and by anthropomorphising constructed ideal images in poetry and narratives, I am better able to describe the way that our relationships to them change and change us.

Language and voice are very present in drag. Drag queens are often expected to embody the voice of someone else through lip-syncing or to embody the voice of the queer community. I often use the device of lip-syncing to challenge the positionality of the voice speaking, the performer, and the image being spoken about. The positionality is meant to be fluid, as I think language used to describe identity should be. Humans have constructed identities through language in order to try to understand them as static and clearly delineated, when in fact they are not. The challenge is trying to use language to describe something which is always transforming.



Victoria Sin, Narrative Reflections on Looking (2016-2017). Courtesy the artist.

I like the idea that poetry may contain an inherent fluidity, in that it is infinitely interpretable via metaphor. One of the most intriguing aspects of your practice is the way you title your works: they're long, seductive, and they resist hierarchies and definitions. Let's talk about your early drag persona and how it has evolved to grapple with the joy and alienation of both the history of drag and transgender politics now?

Titles are important. They can be little works in themselves, they can add an unexpected layer to a work, and also act as a way in. My titles often include clues and references. For example, the title of my film which was recently in the Hayward Gallery's *DRAG* exhibition, *Tell me everything you saw, and what you think it means* (2018) is a direct quote from Grace Kelly in Hitchcock's *Rear Window*. It plays on the way the film deals with the ethics of voyeurism, and the fact that within it Grace Kelly is the real object of the gaze.

My recent performance for the Serpentine Galleries' Park Nights 2018 programme, *The sky as an image, an image as a net* (2018) speaks to our relationship with images. A blue sky is the result of molecules in the air scattering blue light from the sun more than red light, and that light is so intense that it obstructs stars and everything else we can see at night. Stars and the dark expanse they sit in remind us of our minuscule place in a possibly infinite universe, and the possibilities within it. In the same way, within an image-based culture, images we are bombarded with every day—which represent and reify cultural constructs like gender—prevent us from seeing past pre-existing categories.

My drag character is directly related to this because it's an attempt at an ideal image of Western femininity, one which has been fed to me in this image-based culture. It's an image I have consciously and unconsciously strived towards my whole life, and which has affected the way that I relate to myself and to others. A lot of drag is about unlearning for me, but it's also creating new models of gender and identity. It's always been a speculative space. I've had friends who have come out as trans after experimenting with drag, and it was through drag that I realised I wasn't a woman. This unlearning and rewriting of my identity has allowed me to see myself and my relationships in ways I could never have previously imagined.



Victoria Sin, Tell me everything you saw, and what you think it means (2018). Courtesy the artist.

Could you talk about your background and how the 'unlearning' you refer to within your drag persona has informed your national/antinational/cultural identity? How will these ideas inform your performance in Taipei as part of Su Misu's solo exhibition at Chi-Wen Gallery?

The unlearning has as much to do with race as it has to do with gender. As a mixed-race person of colour growing up in a Western society, I've been through a lot of phases in my relationship to whiteness. Growing up I wanted to be white. I remember telling my mother that I would never be beautiful because I didn't have blonde hair and blue eyes like she did. She was of course horrified, but that really was something I thought based on the culture that I lived in and the narratives and images that surrounded me.

Following that there was a phase of not wanting to be white at all, and feeling ashamed at being closely related to people who were white and had racist attitudes, working through my relationships to them at the same time as trying to recognise those attitudes which I had inherited. To be honest, working through relationships and the attitudes inherited from the

people that raised you and the culture you live in never ends—it's an ongoing process, as tackling racism in a society built on white supremacy should be. Drag is a safe place for me to act on my desire and take pleasure in embodying things that the culture I'm present in has always told me I want to be, while at the same time presenting them as a fallacy, a goal with no end except control.

In terms of nationalism, I have always been asked 'where are you from?' and the answer people want is never Canada, where I lived until I was 18, or London, where I've lived since. I have never felt especially connected or loyal to a country, though I have always had the immense privilege of having citizenship. All of this is to say that identity is incredibly complex, and my work is where I can take my experience of it and image it in the ways I can see it, only transformed through fantasy and theatrical devices.



Victoria Sin, Narrative Reflections on Looking (2016-2017). Courtesy the artist.

My new performance for Chi-Wen Gallery in Taipei, *If I had the words to tell you we wouldn't be here now*, will be presented in their beautiful garden on 16 January, in the run-up to <u>Taipei Dangdai</u> [18–20 January 2019]. I'll be working with Taiwanese pipa player Peiju Lien, in

order to bring in a sense of the auditory landscape that I grew up with watching my grandmother's Cantonese opera tapes as a child—though the way Peiju plays the instrument is much more contemporary, and in this case, Taiwanese rather than Chinese. These tapes often featured female actors playing romantic lead roles opposite each other—one would play a man and one would play a woman. I'm finding the narratives that have always been present in my life which have gone ignored, and questioning the role language plays in the reproduction of identity categories.

It's funny—I felt the same way growing up in India. There were advertisements for skin lightening creams everywhere. Today, when I video call my grandma, she tells me I look 'nice' when I look fair and 'tired' when I have a tan!

Yes, my grandmother does the same.

Still, sometimes the past feels so discriminatory, and sometimes it feels much more radical.

Again, in India, we've had a third gender since forever, yet homosexuality was only recently decriminalised.

Yes, that may also be a complex thing where laws against homosexuality, and erased queer histories, are wrapped up in histories of colonialism. I think probably it's been back and forth across intertwining histories of phobia, acceptance, and even celebration—more times than we can imagine.



Victoria Sin, Narrative Reflections on Looking (2016-2017). Courtesy the artist.

I was struck by the films at Sotheby's and their heightened theatricality. The hyperbolic 'she', the dry ice, the poetry, the proximity. Do you want to talk a little about your formal choices and the work they do?

The work at Sotheby's is a body of work called Narrative Reflections on Looking (2016–2017), it's four films on desire in the experience of identifying with images. The films' narratives all come from really personal experiences of looking and wanting, which have been slightly abstracted with a lens of fantasy or science fiction. The films use the medium to tap into the language of cinema; to highlight how technologies of representation—such as cinema or any images on screens, or magazines or any popular media—create and reify the identity categories and ideals they represent. They were all filmed on 4k, which allows you to get these highly detailed closeups.

The thing about drag is that you often create a fantasy on stage, but when you look closely you can see the fallacy—that the diamonds are fake, that the glamorous hair is an old wig, that the eyelashes are falling off a little. Making these films allowed me to give the fantasy

and at the same time show how heavily it is constructed in a way that does not undermine it. Like, yes it's all fake but so what? I'm still breathtaking, and what's real anyways?

Could you tell me about your upcoming collaboration with Sophia Al-Maria at Whitechapel Gallery?

The work at Whitechapel Gallery will be very exciting. Sophia asked me to write a creation myth for the show, which I have re-imagined as an apocalypse myth. The work is heavily influenced by Ursula le Guin's *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*, which emphasises the power of stories, and the importance of stories which hold many perspectives and many ideas together. It is also influenced by Octavia Butler and her *Earthseed* books in which 'God is Change', because the only thing that is for certain is that everything will change, and that is a future we should be ready for.



Victoria Sin, *Dream Babes* live programme at Auto Italia South East, London (7–9 September 2016). Courtesy Auto Italia South East. Photo: Holly Falconer.

In your ongoing project *Dream Babes*, you talk about sci-fi as a strategy for queer resistance. Tell me more? Where is it headed?

Dream Babes is very much influenced by Afrofuturism and Cyberfeminism. My main influences in the project have been important figures in both these movements: Samuel Delany, Ursula le Guin, Octavia Butler, Donna Haraway. Delany, Le Guin, and Butler are the most read in the project's reading group, and in my own personal reading. These are authors who showed me what it was like to live in societies where non-binary gender is the norm, or that are self-governed and non-hierarchical.

The power of science fiction is world-making. You can create a whole new model for society that does not depend on current socio-political infrastructure, or you can make a world that shows us the dire projected future of our own socio-political system. Or you can make a world that speaks more incisively about our own world than non-fiction ever could, using aliens and galaxies instead of nationalism, race, or gender. Each of these can be incredible, mind altering, and powerful devices. The next step for *Dream Babes* will be a sequel to our last *Speculative Futures Zine* published with PSS, where I ask various practitioners to contribute texts, images, or poems that do the work of world-making from much-needed intersectional perspectives. —[O]

Artists Sophia Al-Maria and Victoria Sin on making art for the apocalypse



Victoria Sin, "Preface/Looking Without Touching", 2017, film still (detail) Courtesy the artist

With a collaborative film showing in London, the artists speak about why the end of the world could be a good thing for everybody but rich men

30th January 2019

Text Irina Baconsky

Sophia Al-Maria and Victoria Sin: BCE

9 IMAGES





Unearthing the origins of the world is a daunting task. Throughout the centuries, countless narratives have sought to dig up the distant past, hoping for answers to the impenetrable enigma of human existence. Whether sacred or profane, creation myths have been overwhelmingly dominated by rigid binaries and the strong patriarchal ethos informing politics and society at large.

Imagining an alternative to this binary way of viewing the world and its inception was what drove filmmaker Sophia Al-Maria to first reach out to writer and performer Victoria Sin – an encounter resulting in instant chemistry, both creatively and personally.

Now showing at London's Whitechapel Gallery, where Qatari-American artist Al-Maria is Writer in Residence, *Sophia Al-Maria*: *BCE* is a two-room film installation refreshingly exploring the concept of creation myths through a feminist, intersectional lens.

Neither future nor past was left uncharted by the duo's gaze. The first film displayed in the gallery's space sees a woman of the Wayuu tribe, in northern Colombia, give an ancestral account of the power of feminine rage through the story of Wolunca – the first Wayuu woman, who had a 'vagina dentata'. In the second room of the space, separated by a sheer, membrane-like curtain, is the second film directed by Al-Maria. Made in collaboration with Canadian-born Sin – who wrote and performed the visually striking piece – the film is a futuristic, science-fiction inspired creation myth interrogating the patriarchal dimensions of race, sex, gender, and fertility. "How many stars? How many worlds? How many

ways of being alive?" asks Sin halfway through the film. With the show open now, we ask the creative duo to tell us more about their take on speculative fiction, post-apocalyptic worlds, and highly underrated aesthetic relevance of tacky sci-fi B-movies.

"With the end of the world comes a lot of space and possibility. I like exploring the idea of how we would recreate ourselves from scratch" - Victoria Sin

How did you first come across each other?

Sophia Al-Maria: I first saw Victoria from afar, before we met, as I had started to gather up ideas about what I wanted to do for this writing residency. I remember seeing Victoria as this sort of apparition at a very important moment for me. So I just contacted them, out of the blue, and asked if they would be interested in gracing these events I had in mind with their presence – like a sort of deity that was visiting from some other planet. That's how it all began. Then, Victoria invited me to this reading group...

Victoria Sin: Yes. The reading group was part of a project that I'd thought of based around speculative science fiction and the importance and value of it in a lot of intersectional practices, especially for queer people and queer people of colour. We discussed works by people like Ursula Le Guin, and yeah, Sophia and I really bonded over our mutual love for this. Over time, it developed into the film you see in Whitechapel.

Victoria Sin: In all our work together, the idea of science fiction was very important. For the past years, I've been thinking about the narratives that surround us every day and how these narratives are deeply entrenched in our psyche. I'm interested in how we create these narratives about ourselves, including about gender and race, the ways in which we think about being human, what we can or can't do. I did this thing that a lot of sci-fi writers do when Sophia asked me to write a creation myth: it was to think about how the world would start after an apocalypse, like a blank slate. This has been done a lot in literature, for example, in a book which is referenced in the film; Octavia Butler's Parable of the Sower. It deals with a young black woman who starts a new religion in this post-apocalyptic America which looks scarily similar to how things are currently going. In the opening chapter of the book, a new president has taken over and his slogan is 'Make America Great Again'. It's quite spooky.



Sophia Al-Maria, 2018 Courtesy Whitechapel Gallery

Apocalyptic scenarios are often depicted as tragic in male-driven science-fiction, but from an intersectional perspective, could there be a positive twist on it?

Sophia Al-Maria: It reminds me of this one line; 'The apocalypse is just the rich man's word for apocalypse. The dominant paradigm's word for revolution.'

I don't use the metaphor of 'apocalypse' as a negative thing. It's obviously a negative thing for the people who have power or who have something to lose. But for those who have nothing to lose, letting go, and dissolving essentially into the crowd or into molecules, is actually liberation. These death/rebirth cycles are part of our ancient ancestral stories. That was the natural order of things; the destruction, the death always preceding the birth.

Victoria Sin: I agree. With the end of the world comes with a lot of space and possibility. I like exploring the idea of how we would recreate ourselves from scratch. Would we even be humans? Would we just be dissolved bacteria and molecules?

The film you did together has a strong visual ethos. Victoria, you're in drag, performing a monologue in a saturated outer space. What were you visual influences in the making of the two films?

Sophia Al-Maria: Well, I have very bad taste in movies, for sure. I like kitsch, neon, lurid colours. I'll eat any garbage. That, and *Barbarella*!

Victoria Sin: Sci-fi B-movies and 90s body horror were a big visual influence, I think. When Sophia told me she wanted to film me in space while in drag, I instantly said 'YES!'.

What do you hope this body of work conveys to the audience?

Victoria Sin: I hope that the work shows a different way of how things could be, and take people out of their lifestyle for a minute. I hope it puts people in a fantasy realm for a while so that when they back to their normal lives, they can look at it a bit differently. The best thing that I can hope this work does is to show people that we live in a multiplicity of narratives that often contradict each other. Things are incredibly complex rather than binary, and it's important to seek out to understand this complexity.

Sophia Al-Maria: I agree with that. The key in this particular body of work is creating an island of some kind, a sort of hinterland for people to access. It feels familiar, it operates inside of the structure of these kinds of myths that we've all heard before, and yet it's also disjointed and disturbing the usual parts of these narratives.



Sophia Al-Maria, "Black Friday" (2016). Digital Video Installation view. Whiteney Museum of American Art Courtesy Third Line Gallery

The Art Newspaper, 2018

Victoria Sin plumbs watery depths for Gasworks fundraiser in London

LOUISA BUCK 7th November 2018 17:57 GMT



Victoria Sin performing at the Gasworks fundraiser Photo: Louisa Buck

While the rest of London was letting off fireworks to celebrate Guy Fawkes Night (Monday 5 November) there was a different form of illuminated, elemental drama unfolding in the house of Catherine Petitgas, the collector, patron and chair of the London art space Gasworks. She was hosting the much-loved Vauxhall-based organisation's annual fundraising dinner, the highlight of which was an unforgettable performance by the Gasworks studio artist Victoria Sin.

The Art Newspaper, 2018

As the lights went down, the works by the likes of Beatriz Milhazes, Gabriel Orozco and Jorge Pardo covering the walls of Ms Petitgas's art-lined sitting room were engulfed in a limpid projection of rippling water that provided the backdrop for Sin's decidedly fluid (in all senses) work A View from Elsewhere (Part 1). This involved the artist—who identifies as non-binary, uses the pronoun "they" and describes themself as "a non-male drag queen"—lip-synching a visceral, high-octane monologue that spanned pathologies of consumption, queer behaviour and evolution theory, whilst resplendent in a costume of body-hugging blue sequins topped off with a cascade of platinum blonde curls.

Toronto-born but London based since 2009, Sin is one of 13 artists currently benefiting from studio space at Gasworks's Vauxhall headquarters. For over 20 years, since 1994, Gasworks has provided not only a place to work but also international residencies and essential early exhibitions to a multitude of artists from the UK and worldwide, with its alumni including Chris Ofili, Yinka Shonibare, Marvin Gaye Chetwind, and Tania Brughera—who is currently occupying Tate Modern's Turbine Hall. As well as Sin, Gasworks's current intake of international artist occupants hail from New Zealand, Peru, Pakistan and Chile and after last night's event considerable pledges were made and renewed in order to allow the invaluable work to continue.



MUNROE BERGDORF TALKS DRAG WITH ARTIST VICTORIA SIN

BEAUTY FEATURE

21.11.2018

TEXT MUNROE BERGDORF

IN A NEW SERIES, OUR LGBTQ+ EDITOR HAS FRANK
CONVERSATIONS WITH HER LGBTQ+ HEROES. FIRST UP, IS
THE SUBVERSIVE ARTIST AND BEAUTY ICON
VICTORIA SIN.

As well as being a <u>bronzed sex goddess</u>, an important activist for transgender rights and an all-around 21st Century trailblazer, Munroe Bergdorf has managed to squeeze in the time to become our LGBTQ+ Editor at Dazed Beauty, and we're incredibly excited about it. This means that over the coming months Munroe will be speaking to her favourite LGBTQ+ icons about some of the most pressing issues facing the LGBTQ+ community today, as well as asking: when your identity is inherently marginalised, what does it take to feel beautiful? Below, the first in the series.

London-based and Toronto-born drag artist Victoria Sin has performed everywhere from The Serpentine Galleries to the ICA over the last two years, and their work has recently been on show at the Hayward Gallery's groundbreaking exhibition *DRAG: Self-Portraits and Body Politics* alongside Cindy Sherman and David Wojnarowicz. Spanning performance art to ephemera (like these <u>oddly beautiful old make-up wipes</u>), through to mesmerising video work (side note: check out the <u>Nowness film</u> they starred in here), Victoria's multi-disciplinary practice seeks to redefine high femme beauty from a queer perspective and challenge expectations of feminine labour.

"Victoria Sin is one of the most fascinating drag performers in London right now," explains Munroe Bergdorf on her keenness to meet the performer, "Not only because they look absolutely incredible, but their intelligence, humour and ability to articulate issues within the drag scene, makes them an inimitable force to be reckoned with... an icon in the making." Fresh from performing at Sasha Velour's 'Nightgowns' in New York, Victoria sat down with Munroe for a catch up about journeys, aesthetics and future goals.

So how are you? I saw you out in America repping us!

Victoria Sin: I'm good! I'm a little exhausted, burning the wick at both ends, but I feel accomplished! A lot of things are happening. And yes, I was repping the UK drag scene there with Sasha at Nightgowns in Hell's Kitchen.

So how was working with Sasha? I love how she's bringing so many different representatives of the drag community together.

Victoria Sin: I mean Sasha's so wonderful. I met Sasha opening up for her show in Bristol and then she invited me to perform at Nightgowns in London and New York. Sasha's one of the RuPaul queens who is most clued up. In the shows, there's always a huge representation of people of colour, trans people, people who are not cisgendered men. It's really refreshing. And they always open with a speech that tries to communicate a sense of urgency; we need that because queer communities all over the world are in a state of emergency.

"IT WAS THROUGH A PROCESS OF DOING DRAG AND PURPOSEFULLY PUTTING ON A GENDER AND THEN TAKING IT OFF AGAIN THAT I REALISED I WAS NON-BINARY"

Absolutely, that's definitely what I got a real sense of — drag as resistance. What I like so much about your form of drag is that it's educational without having to over-explain things. You are educating people with your existence, especially as a femme representing non-binary person. But what obstacles have you found?

Victoria Sin: When I first started drag I identified as a woman so my first hurdle was not being taken seriously. And it was actually through a process of doing drag and purposefully putting on a gender and then taking it off again that I realised I was non-binary. I participate less in the club scene than I used to because I got tired of always having to validate why I'm there in the first place.

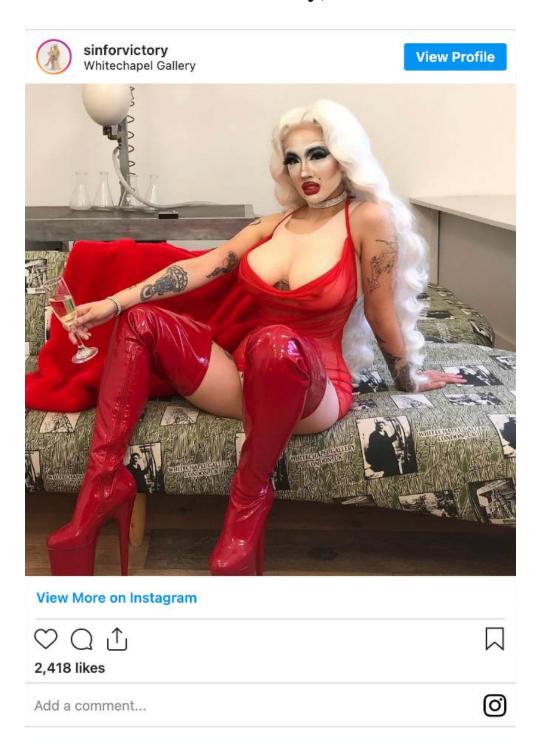
Has that made you see your form of drag differently? Has that affected your drag rather than just the spaces you perform in?

Victoria Sin: It affected my drag and it affected the context I chose to exist in.

My existence is valid. Non-binary gender identity is valid. Femme identities are important. There is a lot to work through in those kinds of identity positions, so in order to do that, I found that the usual drag context and club context — at least more mainstream club spaces where drag usually happens — aren't the best contexts for me.

Why do you think that is? There was a story recently of a drag queen that identifies as female who got an offer to do a job with a brand and the brand actually rescinded the offer when they found out that she was a woman. It's misogyny, do you agree?

Victoria Sin: Absolutely. I think that situation is so layered because you have a company that wants to use the image, idea and popularity of drag culture to make them look cool and edgy, but when they were confronted with where the queer community is with drag now, that's not what they wanted. They wanted the most basic kind of representation, which is a cisgender man playing an idea of a woman. But why that idea is so basic and superficial is because it is an image that has been produced over many years by a queer community that has deep-rooted issues with misogyny, transphobia, racism, all of these things.



Yes. Let's come back to that. So, to change the subject a tiny little bit, talk us through the Victoria Sin aesthetic.

Victoria Sin: When I started doing drag I didn't really have a defined aesthetic in mind, I was just concerned with learning how to do drag make-up. Once I had the tools to make myself how I wanted to look, that was when I started drawing from various iconographies of Western femininity that I've always been obsessed by. So obviously it's Marilyn Monroe or Marlene Dietrich, but then with my body it's Kim Kardashian — a really exaggerated figure — and in my make-up you can see Jessica Rabbit. These are images

that I was always really obsessed by. Amanda Lepore is my drag inspiration pinnacle, and I think that is really important and that has to do with my whole concept and how I approach drag. Amanda Lepore is a trans woman but the way she does her gender every day is purposeful. She does her gender on a level that is a thousand times more extravagant and beautiful than many drag queens, but she's not a drag queen.

With all of those references and Western beauty icons, would you say that taking on these icons is a kind of political performance?

Victoria Sin: It is but when I started doing drag it wasn't to be political. The first time I did drag was on my own and I didn't tell anybody that I was going to do it.

Tell us about that moment...

Victoria Sin: I'd been thinking about doing drag for a long time. I remember using my fake ID to get into big gay clubs and drag shows in Toronto when I was 17. I always had an obsession with it but at the time I didn't know I wanted to be a drag queen because I didn't know it was something that was available to me. When I moved to London I slowly started meeting people and realised with drag you could just do anything, you could be anything; an object, an animal, a person, it didn't matter. The first time I did drag I remember I bought a really cheap shake-and-go white bob. It was in the evening and I closed my blinds and I put on some music (I wish I could remember what it was now) and I put on a YouTube video (again I wish I could remember which one).

"THE TRANSITION, IT'S PERSONAL BUT IT'S NOT PERSONAL BECAUSE AT SOME POINT EVERYONE ELSE HAS TO SEE IT."

What year would this be?

Victoria Sin: This was... I can't remember! I've been doing it for about five

years now. So 2013?

Miss Fame was around that time...

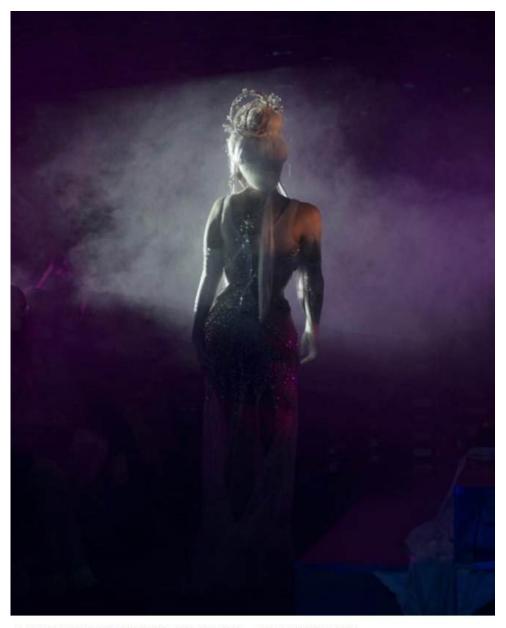
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So you put on some music...

Victoria Sin: And it was a really intimate moment. I had admitted to myself that buying the wig was beginning this process; that I was going on this journey that I had wanted to go on for so long. It's an incredibly vulnerable place right, to admit to yourself something and know that you're going to have to go through it. The transition, it's personal but it's not personal because at some point everyone else has to see it. When I do drag now I have the same kind of reverential attitude to it, where every time I do it it's a ritual. It's a very intimate transformation where both of my identities — I hate to say both because I don't think I put on a persona but I do — both change.

But don't we all when we dress up? I think that's part of what makes it exciting - it brings a different aspect of ourselves to the surface. It's pretending, but at the same time, it's existing.

Victoria Sin: You said when you dress up you change a little bit but that's the amazing thing about the transformation, I don't think that I change. What I do know is that it definitely changes the way people treat me, especially when I walk through a gay bar. When I started to do drag I noticed that all of a sudden people got out of my way when I walked through the bar! I've had to literally elbow my way through a crowd of white middle-aged bears at those clubs and pubs we've all been to, only to have someone mumble "fucking lesbian" in my ear. But all of a sudden when I'm in drag people are like "Oh my God, you look amazing, please step this way". That also has something to do with the fact that they have no idea what I look like out of drag.



SERPENTINE GALLERIES PARK NIGHTS, 27TH JULY 2018 PHOTO BY LEWIS RONALD

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DEAR <u>@TRIXIEMATTEL</u> ... YOU DO NOT GET TO 'MAKE RACISM FUNNY'. THIS MAY HAVE BEEN A JOKE BUT CALLING ANY BLACK PERSON A SLAVE FOR LAUGHS IS REALLY FUCKING STUPID, INSENSITIVE AND PLAIN OLD RACIST...

PIC.TWITTER.COM/N15UGYAHBZ

What would you like to see change within the drag community?

Victoria Sin: Oh gosh so many things! An end to bigotry. The drag community fosters and supports so many queens who do drag without any thought to what they're saying with their drag. I'm not saying all drag has to be political but all drag should be self-aware because drag is embodying something that you don't usually.

Well, it is kind of a political act without meaning to be. Queer bodies are political and politicised.

Victoria Sin: I think you're absolutely right and what I meant to say is that drag is inherently a political act, so by not thinking critically about what your drag is doing, drag can be a very dangerous and violent space. If you are a cisgender man pretending to be a woman and your jokes are about women then that's just fucking shitty. If you are a white drag queen and you are doing drag as a working-class black woman, which is something that happened not too long ago in a popular venue in London, and was a weekly act, what are you doing there? And it's often the queens who do drag that is racist, misogynist, classist, ableist that are the first people to cry cultural appropriation at those who are women and doing drag. I don't think it's a coincidence.

I wanted to touch on what your opinion is on certain queens like Bianca del Rio or Trixie Mattel whose comedy is a little more cutting but still they hold a certain privilege. Trixie Mattel was recently filmed saying a cotton picking joke about Latrice Royale and she said: "drag is inappropriate, drag is not politically correct"...

Victoria Sin: That just sounds to me like people crying "political correctness gone mad" whenever people who need safe spaces are trying to make them, or whenever someone who is actually extremely problematic is being called out. I think that if the humour that is cutting is being used in service of cutting down things like racist or misogynistic attitudes in the drag scene then yes, I'm all for it. But it's always about who's being cut in the cutting humour, right? And I think that the personas doing the cutting are usually the ones

that are not up for any kind of self-reflection, not up for looking at their own attitudes or being called out. It's a very defensive kind of drag that comes from a place of pain, usually.

Absolutely. I always say that, hurt people hurt people.

Victoria Sin: Yes and I think that's absolutely true, but there's only so much that I think we should allow people. Just because they're hurt it doesn't mean they can hurt others. Especially when those people are already being systematically marginalised. Just because you experience homophobia doesn't mean you don't have to look at how you contribute to other forms of structural oppression, especially ones which are rampant in your community.



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The last thing I want to discuss is the face prints on the wet wipes... I love it! It really harkens back to *Hedwig and The Angry Inch*, that movie that I was obsessed with. It's like, forever immortalising the night...

Victoria Sin: Exactly, and that's really what they're meant to be! They're an archive of the performance of gender, of identity, of everything from that evening or that day. They are also a record of the feminine labour that was produced on the occasion to say that it happened and this is proof, but they are also performative pieces in themselves as well. Some of them are going to be shown as part of an exhibition opening later this month at Sotheby's S2 alongside my film series Narrative Reflections on Looking. They're important archival objects and I keep all of them. I don't show all of them but I keep them because I think it's almost like proof to myself... that I was there and my contribution is important.

That seems like a perfect note to end on. Thanks, Victoria.

Frieze, 2017

Post-Cyber Feminist International 2017

Twenty years after the First Cyberfeminist International at Documenta X, what does Cyberfeminism look like in 2017?





Victoria Sin performing at Glitch @ Night, part of Post Cyber Feminism International 2017, ICA, London. Courtesy: ICA, London; photograph: Mark Blower

Frieze, 2017

'You don't have to nail something down in order to build something,' said Victoria Sin at the 'Diagramming Post-Cyber Feminism' workshop convened by Res. – a mutable project based in a gallery and workspace in Deptford, South East London – perhaps invoking Audre Lorde's 'master's tools,' also referenced by Diana McCarty in the opening panel. And in case you'd like to know, yes, Cyberfeminists use Macs: even as they consider the possibilities of non-proprietary software, some of the master's tools have to be employed. Legacy Russell's 'Glitch Feminism', coined in 2013, seizes on 'the causality of error,' available in mainstream technology though, as Clarke-Brown pointed out, these practices are also available to Cyberfeminism's antagonists: 'Trump ... acts through glitching.' Just as offline oppressions have intensified in their online incarnations, so the fight against a reinforced 'big daddy mainframe' (VNS Matrix) has got harder. For Sollfrank 'the solution is still micropolitics,' though Hester calls for a response that tackles the politics of scale used by multinationals and government.

But is any of this art? Sollfrank, who regrets that much of the First International's art wasn't recorded, maintains the interdependency of activism and aesthetics: 'Everything I did with Cyberfeminism was as an artist, I was interested in forms of organization as an aesthetic practice.'

The <u>Post-Cyber Feminist International</u> was held at the ICA,
London 15 – 19 November 2017. <sub>Main image: Victoria Sin performing at Glitch

@ Night, part of Post-Cyber Feminist International 2017, ICA, London. Courtesy: ICA,
London; photograph: Mark Blower</sub>

Workin' it! How female drag queens are causing a scene

Women are embracing drag and camp glamour to playfully subvert gender and femininity. Miss Malice, Holestar and Victoria Sin explain why they are revamping queer culture



Rebecca Nicholson

Mon 10 Jul 2017 16.59 BST



▲ Victoria Sin. Photograph: Holly Falconer

At the Royal College of Art in Battersea, south London, Victoria Sin is showing me around Narrative Reflections on Looking, an MA showcase of four videos in which Sin, dressed in glamorous evening gowns, a fake nipple peering out from one side, face painted in thick drag makeup, narrates a story about desire and what it means to consume an image. "For me, drag is a space where, after four years of doing it, it's made me realise I'm not a woman," they tell me, explaining that they choose they/them pronouns and identify as non-binary. On the wall, in a perspex case, is a facewipe heavy with the remnants of mascara and lipstick, one of many Sin has saved from various drag shows and performances. "They're a relic of the performance, or the labour that was done that evening. When you put them all together, the amount of labour that goes into doing drag performing femininity, even - becomes very clear."

So, is it a case of performing femininity, rather than "doing drag"? "I think the two are interchangeable. What's important to make clear is that, for me, drag is not performing a woman, drag is performing femininity," says Sin. A person can be a woman and not be at all feminine, they say. Sin's own gender identity has been shaped by this thinking. "Through the process of regularly performing and embodying femininity, it made me think about how I do those things every day. Now I'm doing them less every day. I don't wear makeup any more. I don't usually wear dresses. Today, I'm wearing shoes that are a little bit femme-y for my daily attire, which I quite enjoy. When I do it now, it's almost like a little treat." Sin first became interested in drag at 17, working in a restaurant, where they grew up in Canada. "All the wait staff were gay. I knew I was gay, but I never had any window into gay culture. Every Wednesday and Sunday there were drag shows at this one bar we went to, and it was my first close encounter with drag. I became really obsessed with it." They all identified as men, Sin recalls, but one is now a trans woman. "That's the nature of drag. It's a testing ground."

After moving to London, Sin started to run club nights for friends and would dress in drag, get on the bar and dance. The first time they performed as a drag queen for an audience, however, was at the Glory pub in east London. "I still do the performance I did the first night, which is get on stage and make a sandwich." What's in it? "Butter and that cheese you unwrap. I give it to the audience to eat." It was seeing Holestar in a nightclub that made Sin realise female drag queens existed. "I was completely floored. She was really doing it when nobody around her was doing it. She's often quite vocal about the discrimination she's experienced for performing and existing."

It's true that the backlash against female queens has been sustained, and, at times, distressing. Online discussions about whether cis females should be allowed on Drag Race, for example, usually descend into accusations of "cultural appropriation". "I mean ..." sighs Sin. "First of all, whose culture am I appropriating? Is it gay culture? Because I'm gay. Is it the culture of men? Because last time I checked, drag is performing things that are historically associated with women." Sin says they are doing fewer drag performances now, using drag in their art instead. "I'd rather make films or write about my experiences. Every time I had some exposure, I was getting so much backlash. I was spending so much time responding to the online trolling. I'd say, look, drag is not a male culture, theatrical crossdressing has been happening for hundreds of thousands of years. Ever since gender existed, people have been subverting gender."

Holestar is even more frank about the criticism she has faced, both from cis gay men who object to the very existence of her act, and from the "policing of language" she has experienced within her own community. "I want you to question what I'm doing and who I am, but I also want you to be entertained," she says. For her, the overemphasis on the academic side of drag has taken the fun of subversion away. "Academia's got its place, but the thing is, it's so snooty. It's not inclusive. It's saying: 'Oh,

you don't understand because you've not read Judith Butler.' Bollocks!" she shouts. "Art and expression and performance should be for everybody. Yes, there is a political message underlying what I'm doing, but, actually, drag is fun. It should be fun. Can we not just have fun with it and play with it?"

The Drag Queen Archiving Beauty Looks With Make-Up Wipes

FASHION & BEAUTY / CULTURE TALKS



Impressions © Victoria Sin

We speak to artist and drag performer Victoria Sin about exploring representations of extreme femininity and their first ever lip-sync to a French pop song

MAY 26, 2017 TEXT Hannah Tindle

Victoria Sin is not your common, or 'garden' drag queen. Despite the make-up applied with a trowel, ginormous silicone breast plate and wigs in varying shades of platinum playfully mimicking the sex symbols of the 1940s, there is certainly more than initially meets the eye. Firstly, they were assigned a female gender at birth, but identify as non-binary, taking the pronouns 'they' and 'their'. Secondly, their performances, whilst a veritable extravaganza in terms of Sin's bodily aesthetic, focus on seemingly arbitrary acts, where making a sandwich or drinking a glass of milk on stage become wry comments on the labour of performing femininity.

"Basically, my drag character is always a bit bored to be there. Always looking incredible, but almost irritated by the fact she is having to perform," they tell me over the phone. Sin is in the midst of installing their final exhibition at the Royal College of Art as part of their M.A. in Print, which would explain a penchant for the after-show ritual that they have created as part of taking their make-up off. The resulting prints form the series you see here, which we present alongside their thoughts on what it means to play the role of a woman in its most exaggerated form.



GALLERY / 9 IMAGES

Impressions

On when they started doing drag...

"When I started doing drag about four years ago, I identified as a woman. It was always something I was really interested in. I grew up in quite a traditional family; my parents both worked, so my grandparents brought me up. I come from a conservative Chinese background, so for me, femininity was always something that was performed for eventually marrying a husband that would take care of me. It was something to be seen and not heard. So when I came out, I started going to gay clubs and drag shows, and that's when I saw femininity representing something that meant to be really loud and take up a lot of space. So from the age of 17, I became really obsessed with drag, and when I turned 18 and moved to the UK, I started meeting a lot of people in the drag scene in east London."



On the character of Victoria Sin...

"I think for me it's about being this kind of really over the top and extravagant embodiment of femininity. It's not a critical position of femininity, and it's not a completely celebratory position on femininity - it's both at the same time. I resent the way it was placed on my body when growing up, but I really do love performing it. So, for me doing drag is a way to think through all these things because it's so incredibly complex. Victoria Sin as a character is an amalgamation of a lot of different iconographies of western femininity. If you look at me in drag you can see that there is a little bit of Jessica Rabbit, there is a little bit of Marilyn Monroe - a very idealised image of white femininity. My mother is white and my father is Chinese, and I remember when I was growing asking my mom "Do you think I am beautiful?" I never thought I was because I didn't have blonde hair and blue eyes like she did. Obviously she never told me this, but it was growing up in a western society that made me think this way as a child."



On encountering misogyny in the drag community...

"I mean I think it exists in every aspect of the community and I remember being really surprised when I realised this. When I first started getting into drag, I assumed that because people were performing femininity and that people were like trying to be like women, maybe that they would also be feminists. This was an incredibly naïve position to take. I think a lot of gay spaces are incredibly male and incredibly white. I remember when I first came out and started going to gay bars and drag shows I was a very young, femme-looking, standard Asian girl. My queerness was totally invisible and I was looked at as the 'fag hag'. I would get these gay men coming up to me and grabbing me and touching me. I was really made to feel my body was not my own and that they had entitlement over my body because I was in their space. I was made to feel like a guest when really these spaces should be inclusive."



On their drag shows...

"I have a few different kinds of shows, but the ones that I perform the most are full of dry humour. For example, I'll do something mediocre and domestic – like make a sandwich or drink a glass of milk on stage. The sandwich performance came from the misogynistic expression 'go and make me a sandwich'. I have done a few lip-syncs, mostly to classic drag songs such as I Am What I Am. The first lip-sync I ever did was to a song called Marcia Baila by a French pop group from the 80s, called Les Rita Mitsouko. It's a really silly-sounding song but Catherine Ringer who sings it has a really strong voice and it's really passionate. And if you look at the lyrics, she is actually speaking about her friend who was dying of breast cancer, but when she danced it was like life itself."



On their make-up wipe prints...

"My drag work and my art practice were always kept very separately. But I find that they are both in conversation with each other quite often. So the make-up wipes I see as artworks, as they are literally prints of my face. It's a technique I have developed over a few years now and I do it every time I take off my make-up off. There's a specific way of placing the wipe on the face and pressing and rubbing in a certain way to make a print of my drag make-up. I like to think of them as archives of the feminine labour that was performed that evening. But they also become very performative images in themselves."

talking race and intersectionality in drag with victoria sin

A genderfucked mix between Jessica Rabbit and Marlene Dietrich, Victoria Sin gets real about her journey of drag discovery.

By Jake Hall | Dec 12 2016, 8:40pm



Photography Ronan McKenzie

It's easy to forget that, behind the glitter, false lashes, and shimmering sequins, drag is an act of rebellion against the gender binary. It's also easy to forget that drag — despite what you may see or hear in your local gay bar — is not a practice originated by or belonging to men. Seeking to remind us all of this fact is Victoria Sin, a Toronto-born queen attracting attention and admiration for her brilliantly unique drag (think genderfucked Jessica Rabbit meets Marlene Dietrich) performance art, and powerful statements of activism. Not only is Sin well-versed in race studies and queer theory, she's actively communicating these messages throughout drag. Self-described as a 'performative girl in a normative world,' we reached out to Sin to discuss her journey of drag discovery as well as her experiences of racism and misogyny in queer spaces.



When and why did you first begin to experiment with drag?

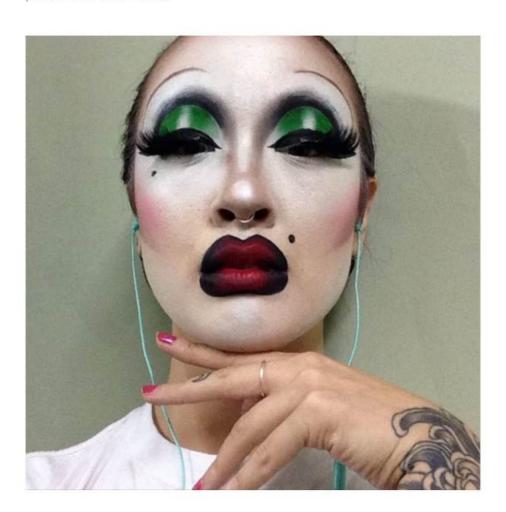
My first few times in drag were about three and a half years ago alone in my room on PhotoBooth, then eventually at a few club nights I threw at Vogue Fabrics in Dalston. Even before that, drag had been a guilty pleasure — when I was 17 I would use a fake ID to get into drag shows with my ex-girlfriend and some guys we worked with in Toronto where I'm from. At that point, as a femme-presenting cis girl, I was very much classified as a 'fag hag' — even as a gay woman in a gay space — and I think 'fag hags' are always made to know their place in gay culture which is not on stage as the main event. From then it was a slow process of moving to London at 18, encountering its 'genderfuck' drag scene, and meeting female queens like Holestar who were doing their own thing and being vocal about their place in drag. That made me realize that there was nothing less valid about my own desire to take up drag.

What does 'dragging up' mean to you?

It means many things to me, among them temporarily and purposefully putting on an exaggerated embodiment of femininity with the intention of using that embodiment to command attention and take up space. It's exercising entitlement, which is something that, as a woman of color in predominantly white male spaces, can be difficult.

How would describe your drag character?

She's evolved over the years. She's like an amalgamation parody of various iconographies of western femininity — Marilyn Monroe, Marlene Dietrich, Jessica Rabbit — but she's also developing on her own. She feels like a very deliberately constructed and sculpted character that I transform into which is strange for me, but it's something I'm using in my work to think generally about identification with gendered and raced imagery and the ways it is inscribed and performed on bodies.



Do you find yourself discriminated against often as a woman in a gay bar?

I do remember going into gay clubs when I'd only just come out and having men I didn't come with grind on me, or grab me inappropriately. It wasn't malicious on their part, they just thought we were having fun and it 'didn't count' because they were gay. I didn't know how to articulate my discomfort at that time but now I know that, even though they weren't trying to sleep with me, I was still a person with boundaries that didn't appreciate being groped without consent. That almost made it worse actually – they were just doing it because they could. More recently I've had gay men mutter "fucking lesbians" at me, or I've been told my conversations contained too much estrogen, that periods are gross – just really basic, really fucking boring shit.

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Do you think this discrimination within queer spaces is addressed often enough?

It's hardly addressed at all, and the enormous weight of addressing this intersecting misogyny, femmephobia, and racism often falls on the shoulders of these who experience it directly. Imagine how it would feel to go into a popular gay bar as a black woman and encounter a white drag queen on stage in blackface making jokes at the expense of working class black women while the largely white, male audience laughs along. This happened recently. It took a petition by Chardine Taylor-Stone with thousands of signatures on it to have the act removed! This act shouldn't have made it on stage, let alone have required a petition for its removal. I refuse to believe that nobody in that audience knew that blackface is unacceptable in 2016. It should have been up to those in positions of privilege – promoters, bookers, bar staff, the drag queen – or someone in the audience to say "Hold on – isn't this act at the expense of some of the most underrepresented people in the queer community? Isn't this act just a reproduction of the systemic violence they experience already in the wider world? Why is this funny? Who am I laughing at?"



Do you still hear the ridiculous opinion that female queens are 'culturally appropriating' drag?

I do see this a lot in online comments about my work, and this point of view is revealing of a number of things. Firstly, these people believe that women aren't part of gay culture, an infuriating notion in itself because the erasure of women from gay culture and histories is grossly unacknowledged. Secondly, it assumes the purposeful and exaggerated performance of femininity was originated by gay men (it wasn't) and therefore belongs to them (it doesn't). On a related note, drag — as it exists in mainstream culture now — is largely appropriated from Black and Latino drag queens and trans women, whereas most people I see claiming appropriation tend to be white cis men.

What advice would you give to these people?

If you want to do it, don't wait for permission from some drag gatekeeper because you'll be waiting forever. Do it in whatever way you can; look for queer spaces that are more open, take up space in whatever capacity you can and feel safe doing so, even if it's just by posting your looks online. Find like-minded people, approach them, be bold, go out together, start a night. If there's one thing I've learned while becoming more visible in the last year or so is that there's a huge hunger for spaces and drag that centers underrepresented queer experiences — we're starving. The most important thing we can do now is organize and work collectively to create the communities we want to be a part of and be the drag we want to see — drag that challenges, rather than reproduces, the power structures we're part of.

Read: Belles of the ball, meet London's female drag queens.

Credits

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