

Sin Wai Kin,
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*It's Always You: Sin Wai
Kin's Infinite Universe*
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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.'² 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

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 black-and-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 to pitch a fight . . .')

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 on how you look at it.

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* – 花臉 '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.⁹ 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,¹⁰ 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'.¹¹ Within this division, each self tries 'to expand its territory by projecting or objectifying its counterpart', which Yao defines as 'self-alienation'.¹²

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 reified entity' – faces the 'kinetic negativity' of its unconscious, which defies 'capture by and within ego-level identificatory constructs'.¹³ 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 ever-expanding 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*'¹⁸ – that 'can

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

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'.²⁰ 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 –

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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 trilectics, 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'²⁷ 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 trilectic 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...'³¹

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 Marilyn 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'.³⁴ 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

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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'¹⁴⁵ – 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.¹⁴⁶ 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

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.

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 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.'⁵⁰

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.'⁵¹ 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.

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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?"'⁵³ Citing Arthur Rimbaud's assertion that 'I is 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 open-endedness of art', which 'is what it means to embrace the surface of the pool.'⁵⁴ 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.

- 1 Quoted from Himali Singh Soin, 'Sin Wai Kin in Conversation', *Ocula*, published 11 January 2019 under Sin's previous name, available at <https://ocula.com/magazine/conversations/victoria-sin/> (last accessed on 2 May 2023).
- 2 *Ibid.*
- 3 A chopine is a platform shoe developed in the sixteenth century and especially popular among Venetian women. See Harold Koda, 'The Chopine', Metropolitan Museum of Art, October 2002, available at www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/chop/hd_chop.htm (last accessed on 2 May 2023).
- 4 See Keizo Motoda, 'Don't try' series page on the MEM gallery website, available at https://mem-inc.jp/artists_e/keizo-motoda/dont-try/ (last accessed on 2 May 2023).
- 5 Sin Wai Kin, 'Non-Binary Storytelling and A Dream of Wholeness in Parts', online lecture for the Transfer Project 'Circulating Narratives – Entangling Communities: Case Studies in Global Performance Art', Freie Universität Berlin, 1 December 2021, available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=UHoG-Dhs-B3w (last accessed on 2 May 2023).
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 Quoted in O.H. Fletcher, 'Interview with Sin Wai Kin', *The White Review*, September 2021, available at www.thewhitereview.org/feature/interview-with-sin-wai-kin/ (last accessed on 2 May 2023).
- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 Christine Abigail L. Tan, 'The Butterfly Dream and Zhuangzi's Perspectivism: An Exploration of the Differing Interpretations of the Butterfly Dream against the Backdrop of Dao as Pluralistic Monism', *Kritike*, vol.10, no.2, December 2016, p.101.
- 10 Zhihua Yao, "'I Have Lost Me": Zhuangzi's Butterfly Dream', *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, vol.40, no.3–4, 2013, p.520, quoted in C.A.L. Tan, 'The Butterfly Dream', *op. cit.*, p.107.
- 11 *Ibid.*
- 12 *Ibid.*
- 13 Adrian Johnston, 'Jacques Lacan', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Spring 2023 Edition* (ed. Uri Nodelman and Edward N. Zalta), available at <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2023/entries/lacan/> (last accessed on 2 May 2023).
- 14 C.A.L. Tan, 'The Butterfly Dream', *op. cit.*, p.107.
- 15 *Ibid.*
- 16 *Ibid.*
- 17 'Sin Wai Kin', Tate Turner Prize 2022 nominee interview, 14 October 2022, available at www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-liverpool/turner-prize-2022/sin-wai-kin (last accessed on 2 May 2023).
- 18 Kuang-Ming Wu, *The Butterfly as Companion: Meditations on the First Three Chapters of the Chuang Tzu*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990, p.176, quoted in C.A.L. Tan, 'The Butterfly Dream', *op. cit.*, p.115.
- 19 *Ibid.*
- 20 K.-M. Wu, *The Butterfly as Companion*, *op. cit.*, quoted in C.A.L. Tan, 'The Butterfly Dream and Zhuangzi's Perspectivism', *op. cit.*, p.117.
- 21 C.A.L. Tan, 'The Butterfly Dream', *op. cit.*, p.116.
- 22 K.-M. Wu, *The Butterfly as Companion*, *op. cit.*, p.176, quoted in C.A.L. Tan 'The Butterfly Dream and Zhuangzi's Perspectivism', *op. cit.*, p.115
- 23 C.A.L. Tan, 'The Butterfly Dream', *op. cit.*, p.112.
- 24 Asger Jorn, 'Luck and Chance Dagger and Guitar', in Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen and Jakob Jakobsen (ed.), *Cosmonauts of the Future: Texts from the Situationist Movement in Scandinavia and Elsewhere*, Brooklyn: Nebula with Autonomedia, 2016, p.41. Emphasis original.
- 25 Gerald Holton, 'The Roots of Complementarity' *Daedalus* Vol. 99 No. 4, *The Making of Modern Science: Biographical Studies*, Fall 1970, p.193.
- 26 See Asger Jorn, 'The Natural Order' (1962), in *Cosmonauts of the Future*, p.134.
- 27 Asger Jorn, 'On the Trielectical Method in its Applications in General Sitology' in *Cosmonauts of the Future*, p.242.
- 28 *Ibid.*, p.240.
- 29 A. Jorn, 'The Natural Order', p.144. As noted by Jan Hilgevoord and Jos Uffink: 'Whereas a particle is always localized, the very definition of the notions of wavelength and frequency requires an extension in space and in time.' See 'The Uncertainty Principle', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Winter 2016 Edition* (ed. Edward N. Zalta), available at <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/qt-uncertainty/> (last accessed on 5 May 2023).
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- 40 C.A.L. Tan summarising a concept by Wu discussed in *ibid.*, pp.115–17.
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- 54 *Ibid.*
- 55 '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

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Sin Wai Kin, Still from *A Dream of Wholeness in Parts*, 2021, single-channel video, 23min 03sec. Courtesy artist and Blindspot Gallery, Hong Kong

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Sin Wai Kin, *Today's Top Stories*, 2020,
single-channel video, 6min 30sec. Courtesy
artist and Blindspot Gallery, Hong Kong

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Sin Wai Kin, *Irreconcilable Differences*,
2020, single-channel video, 6min 30sec.
Courtesy artist and Blindspot Gallery,
Hong Kong

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

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

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Sin Wai Kin, *Narrative Reflections On Looking*, still from *Preface/Looking Without Touching*, 2017, single-channel video, 1min 02sec. Image courtesy of artist and Blindspot Gallery, Hong Kong

In Conversation



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

Sin 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 bodies 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.

Planningtorock: Thank you for inviting me. It's so nice to be here.

SWK: Jam's work has been really inspirational to me since I was a young adult, so it's great to be able to share our work in this way now. We're going to structure today 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 *Doorway* by Planningtorock, and *It's Always You*, my work.

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

P: 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-

tion was going to be. We were like, yeah, of course, there's a real commonality in being trans and being nonbinary 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 wholeness, you have to make it for yourself. I think that is really also why I made a boy band. Because for so much of my life, people just could not see masculinity 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.

P: I completely relate to that. For me, *Doorway* was 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 here to help 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 prosthetics, we're both using mirroring. Just the fact that the track is called *Doorway*, I think similarly, *It's Always You* was a little bit of a gateway for me and my practice and this opening out, not only for my practice but also for myself.

P: *Doorway* was definitely quite literally a moment for me to go beyond something, to enter into something, and a moment where both myself and my music understood what making music was for me and its purpose. The lyrics are like, 'I know my feelings under my skin', and I wrote those very quickly, just following the feeling of them. When I was making the clip, I filmed it with a high-speed camera because I wanted it to be dreamy, so slow that it had this undeniability somehow.

SWK: I also shot *It's Always You* in double-time, 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 dreamy quality and effect. But I think that so much of making those characters was the creation of some kind of future self. I have a friend who, after watching those works, was like, every one of these

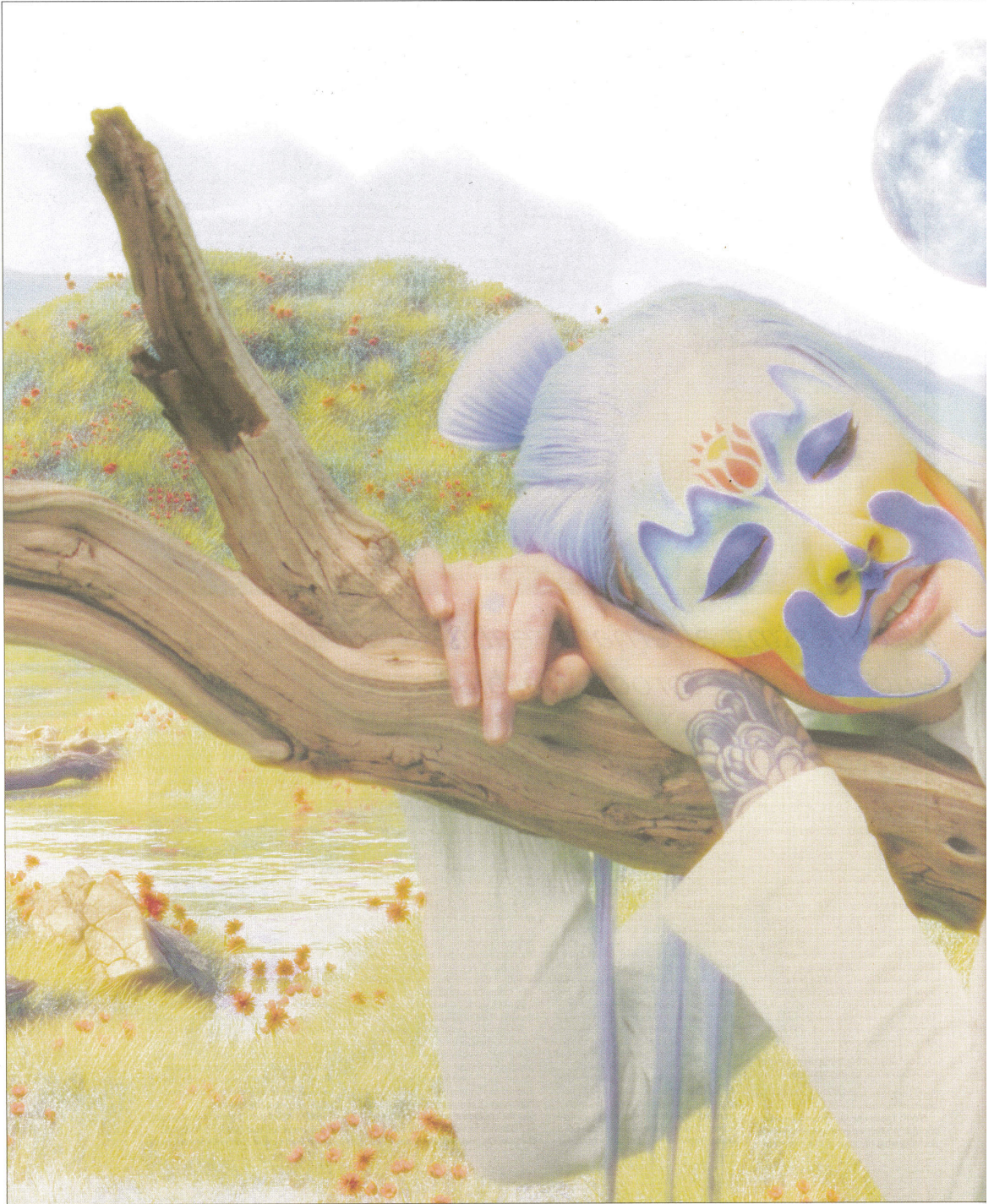
characters is actually just you, in different moments — like, this is you when you're mad at me, this is you when you're drunk! They could see all of these different parts of me, but I had not read that at all into the work. There was something about making that work and making these characters and making the boy band that was almost like I knew something before, or my work knew something before I knew it. That was before I had started taking hormones or medically 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 in 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 help you go forward, but the playfulness is the best part of it. If I look at the video, I can see some of the prosthetics sticking out a little bit. It was made of theatre putty, and it was very hot and the lights meant it kept melting and slipping, and it was really messy, but I quite like that you see that it's actually made, like because I'm literally making Jam, and that was part of the making.

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

IMAGE 24

Sin Wai Kin, *It's Always You*, 2021. Courtesy of the artist and Blindsight Gallery.



The Toe Rag, 2023

Winter 2023

The Toe Rag

25



IMAGE 25 Sin Wai Kin, *The Universe*, 2023. Courtesy of the artist and Soft Opening, London.

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

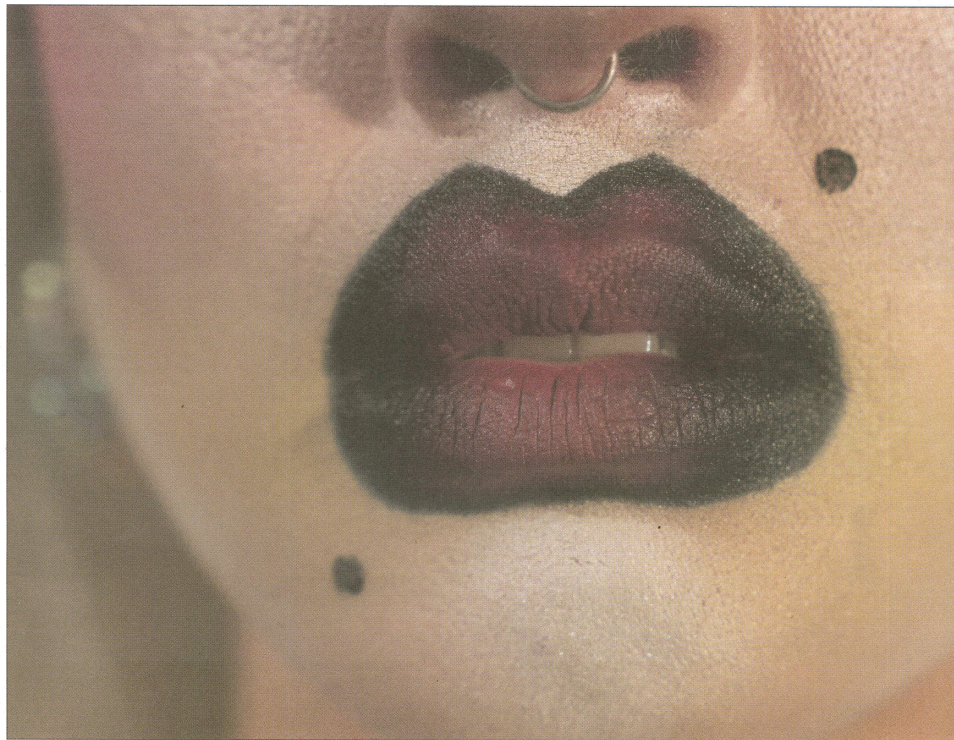


IMAGE 26

Sin Wai Kin *Dreaming the End*, 2023. Courtesy of the artist and Fondazione Memmo, Rome.

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

P: Worth it, worth it.

SWK: It's like a grotesqueness in the making of the thing and the becoming of it.

P: Totally, almost a silliness. Sometimes it would just slide 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 kind of embodied speculative fiction. It's this play, but it's also serious. It's something that, even if I can't really know something in 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, 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 to do it.

SWK: Okay, I think maybe we should move on to the second clips. We're going to play *Misogyny Drop Dead* by Jam [Planningtorock], and my work, *Illocutionary Utterances*.

[*Misogyny Drop Dead* by Planningtorock, and *Illocutionary Utterances* by Sin Wai Kin]

P: It's so good to see these videos. I think it's important to also add that we both edit our own work. So, I work with cinematographers but then I edit and do

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

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 mixer, 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 weird to watch *Illocutionary Utterances* now because it's a little bit older and you know we're talking about your work knowing something before you know it, and I'm looking at it like 'Oh my god, I can hardly watch it'. *Illocutionary utterances* are speech acts that do something at the same time as saying something so, for example, if you say 'I promise you such and such', or 'I order you to do such and such', or as I describe in the film, say 'It's a girl' or 'It's a boy' when somebody is born, or 'I now 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 illocutionary speech act at the end of that work.

P: If you're familiar with my work I did an album called *W*, which I'm very proud of, but I found it very frustrating because it felt 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, Over and Out* and *Misogyny Drop Dead* were part of that. I would love to do a track called *Trans Misogyny Drop Dead*, but this was over ten years ago and I was still learning about intersectionality. The reaction to that track was incredible — some people thought I was making fun of a very serious topic, but I just wanted to be very clear, very direct. I just thought, 'Okay what do I want from patriarchy? I would like it just to fuck 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 lot of fun to work that out, how you can make a clip that'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: Definitely. My work always comes from an extremely personal space informed by personal experience, but one of the cornerstones of my practice is the idea that 'the more personal the more universal', which is something that I read 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 creative with it at the same

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 felt were true in the context that I was in, and so had this really absurd lip sync over the top of a more serious voiceover that feels like you can tell that the character is trying to say something, but you can't hear. That character 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 nonbinary pronouns for other people was when I started to really be able to conceive of people that I knew without gender, and that's when I knew that that's what I was, and that's how powerful language is.

P: 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 Binary Binds* which was the beginning of my understanding that I had didn't connect to this notion of binary gender, but then it would take another five years,

and you don't want, and what you might also unconsciously be doing that doesn't 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 you'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 Planningtorock, and an excerpt from my recent film, *Dreaming the End*.

[*The Breaks* by Planningtorock, and *Dreaming the End* by Sin Wai Kin]

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 already 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 this 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'. It 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 felt 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 into *Dreaming the End* — the birth of The Storyteller. They look 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 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 clip. The whole video is amazing, but I really love the way you do your voice. We've talked a lot about what we do with our voices and what our voices are for us, and I've worked a lot with pitching my voice: I would say that pitching my voice back in 2011 was the first time that I actually met myself. I really heard my voice and I really heard myself — my authentic self — for the first time, although I don't believe in authenticity. 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 began 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 the time, which I was often told was a very feminine voice. That was the tool that I had, and I had to use the kind of projections of femininity that came with my voice, to use that tool in service of the meaning of my work.

But at a certain point, I realised that it didn't feel right anymore. It's interesting also as somebody whose voice — the pitch of my voice — is actually changing in real time. Within *Dreaming the End*, some of the vocals are from before my voice started changing, some of them are while it's changing, and then there are all the different voice modulations that happen in the film electronically. Before your voice sounds like that, you kind of want to know what my voice can sound like. I mean, of course, it doesn't sound like that because it sounds very electronic, but to hear your voice in a lower pitch, you also start to change your intonation, the rhythm of your voice, the melody of your voice. Talking about authenticity, the voice is often thought of as a source of authenticity, think about like the Little Mermaid or whatever, like your 'true self', the vibrations coming from your body, literally. But what I learned when I

started working with a speech therapist was that your voice is as constructed as anything else; where your voice sits in your mouth and your throat and your body is something that you learn how to do. Of course, the melody of your voice, whether your voice goes up and down, which typically feminine voices do, or whether it's more monotone, which is something that typically men's voices 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 granted.

P: Like you say, it's socialised completely. My voice has changed quite a lot over the years — I can't sing as high as I used to be able to, and I can sing a lot lower.

SWK: 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 authenticity 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 1: Thank 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?

P: Exaggeration? Oh, I love exaggeration. I'm all about expanding, always, maximal rather than minimal.

SWK: I use drag in my work, so I love to exaggerate. Parody 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?

P: I think it can be both. If it's really expanded it can be more visible, but I think it opens things up as well. That's why I like to use a lot of humour in my stuff, even though not everybody knows that it's humour. It's a safe space to talk about things.

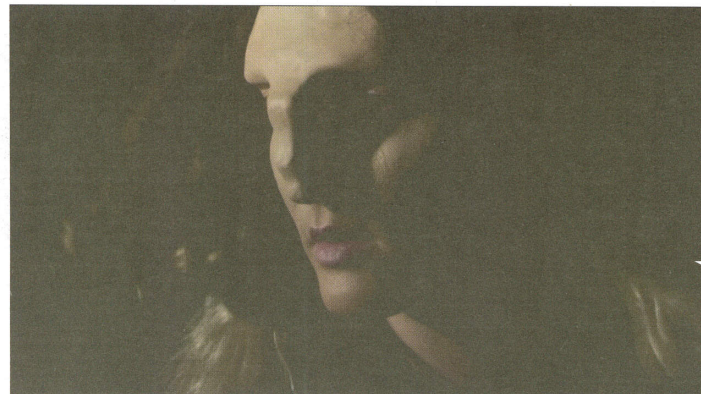
SWK: I think it's a case-by-case thing. But for me, the exaggeration, this pushing of something into a fantasy land, gives me another

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

SWK: We were talking about our work being direct or subtle, 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 operate in? Having said that, though, when I have been more direct, it's interesting who it scares. I remember when I released *Doorway* there were some people who were like, 'I had to stop it halfway through, I found it so scary!', whereas a lot of my queer and trans friends were like, 'This is so funny, you look so beautiful, you look so hot in it!'

SWK: Yeah, it's interesting like when you choose to be more direct or when you choose to be more yourself in your work, who decides to go away and who decides to come closer? I think this work really lies in contrast to *It's Always You*, to the boy band. This work was really in a period of my life and my practice where I was trying to unpick what wasn't mine. Creating fantasy realities and creating alternative realities — one thing is to create worlds that you want to move towards, and another is to kind of be able to create a different perspective to look back at yourself more clearly with and understand what it is that you want



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.

IMAGE 27
Planningtorock, *The Breaks*, 2013. Music video. Courtesy of the artist.

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

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 fix your identity. Do you think that by creating a piece of art and by discovering your future identity, your future self will be stuck to this past identity?

SWK: I was saying I found it quite difficult to see the second clip 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 future I'm something that I can't even imagine now.

P: I'm transitioning right now and sometimes it's hard to see myself in past videos because it was a difficult time, as I wasn't really aware or in contact with my transness. You have to build on it and accept the limitations of the language that you had at the time, and embrace 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 kings do, and it's so freeing to see how you use it. I'm wondering how you started and if it was always part of your art, or if it was separate from your practice before?

SWK: For a long time, drag was not part of my art practice because I was so aware of how by bringing it into cis, hetero spaces it could be fetishised or exoticised. I waited until I had a filmmaking practice where I was able to narrate the experience of looking at these images at the same time as presenting them. That's when I felt comfortable enough to bring it in.

Question 4: Do you think that as you become more comfortable in yourself, you'll have less drive to become these fantasy characters, or do you think that will always stay forever?

SWK: I hope one day I'm like, I have reached my final form, I don't need to do this anymore, I retire! No, no, I don't, actually, I really hope that never happens.

P: Yeah, I hope. We still want to be hot. As long as I want to be hot, there will always be fantasy.

SWK: At the pinnacle of the foot of a mountain, there will always be more hot mountains to climb!

Question 5: I think one of the themes that comes 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 interrelationships 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 done because we 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 false, the binary of individual and context is false, of 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 project.

P: I made *Doorway* together with my friend Gigi, who is also trans, and we've been friends for a very long time. We had a really special moment with the experience of building the prosthetic together, and we were both transitioning. It's definitely not isolated – it's very much together with friends who totally understand, thank goodness.

Question 6: I was wondering about the way you construct sound, the editing 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 heartbeat 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 the pre-production, and then the actual shoot. 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 feel 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 us?

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, opening in October. I am scripting a science fiction sitcom using the idea that time is not 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 coexist.

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 too. In lip sync and in drag, you're sometimes performing dead people's voices and sometimes living people's voices – there's a sense of 'dragging' 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 lots of different contexts because, for example, the way that a work that examines the construction of Western femininity 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 not 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 opera, or just a perspective of whiteness and Western narratives 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 bar! →

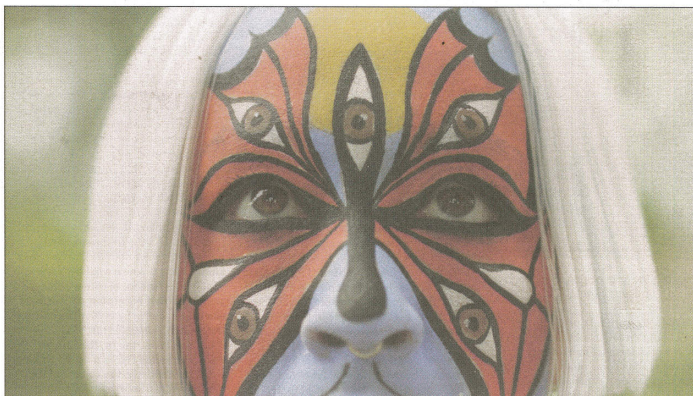


IMAGE 28
Sin Wai Kin, *Act 1 Part 3*
Illocutionary Utterances,
2018. Courtesy of the artist
and Soft Opening, London.

people, or sometimes it's also just me. Then afterwards you go back 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. I often 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 telling me that this was the opposite way that most filmmakers usually work.

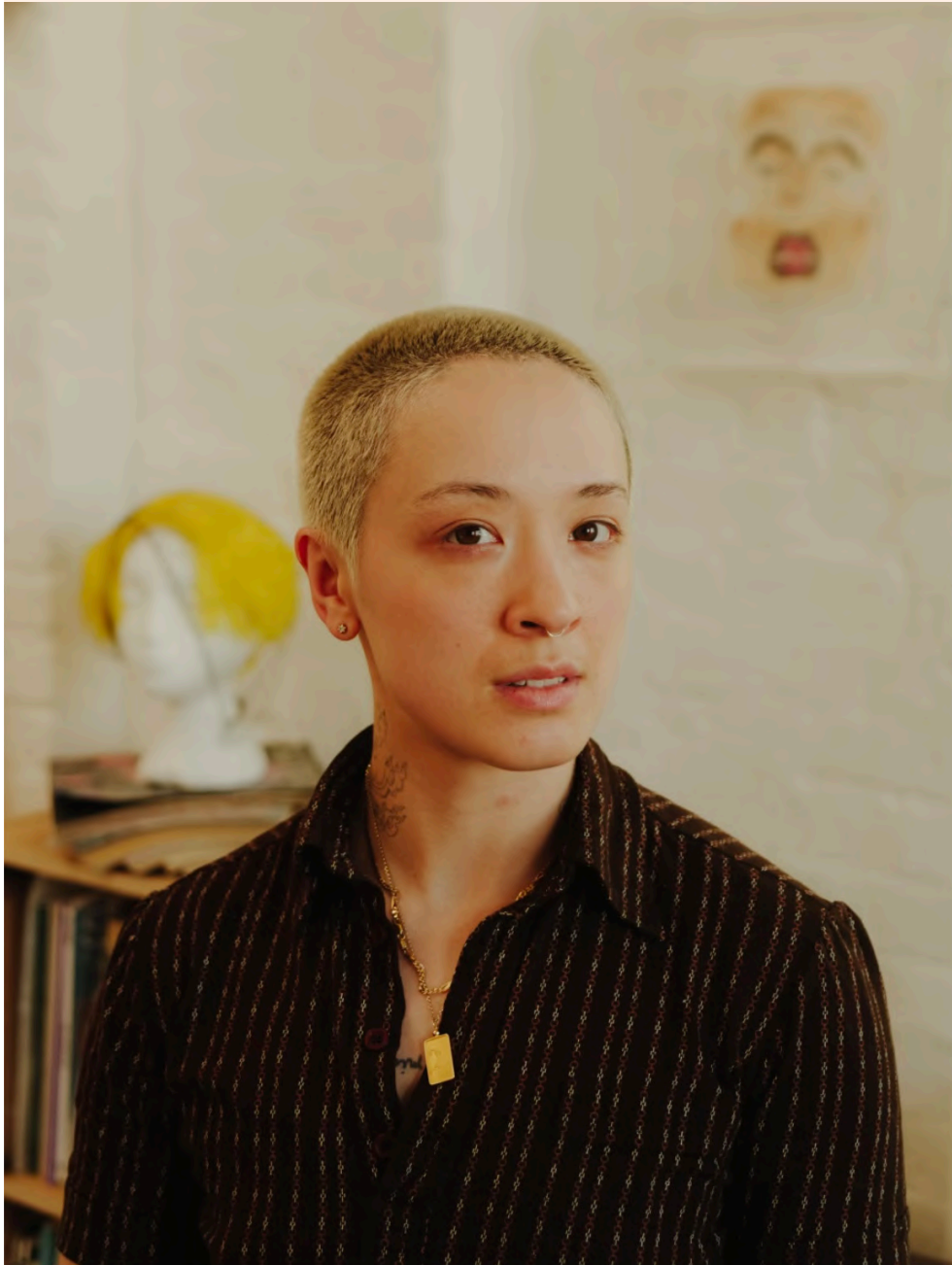
P: But when you're making things yourself, you're so dependent on being inspired by the stuff you're making. Also, it's so unpredictable, I don't know how people do it with mood boards. I just start stuff and then I'm like, oh, that's really interesting, let's follow that. I tried once to do a mood board,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

SWK: Definitely. But I do a lot of storyboarding 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 if you had any thoughts about the relationship between lip sync and temporality.

SWK: Yeah, 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 time. I think there's melancholy in a lot of drag performances, especially performing femininities. But definitely, I think lip-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 it seem like that voice is coming from you, then you can really fool people into a fantasy 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 spirit. 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.



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

Collecting

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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

Financial Times, 2023

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



Financial Times, 2023



© 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.”

If Sin’s early acts followed the time-honoured tradition of gender-bending theatre, for the artist it was rather more. “Drag gave me the tools to separate what I wanted and what other people wanted from me,” they say of their examination of exaggerated western femininity. “It allowed me to dismantle 28 years of socialisation in this gendered culture, and made me aware of the complexity of gender and the absurdity of a society that tells you that you are one of two genders when you are born.”



Financial Times, 2023

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

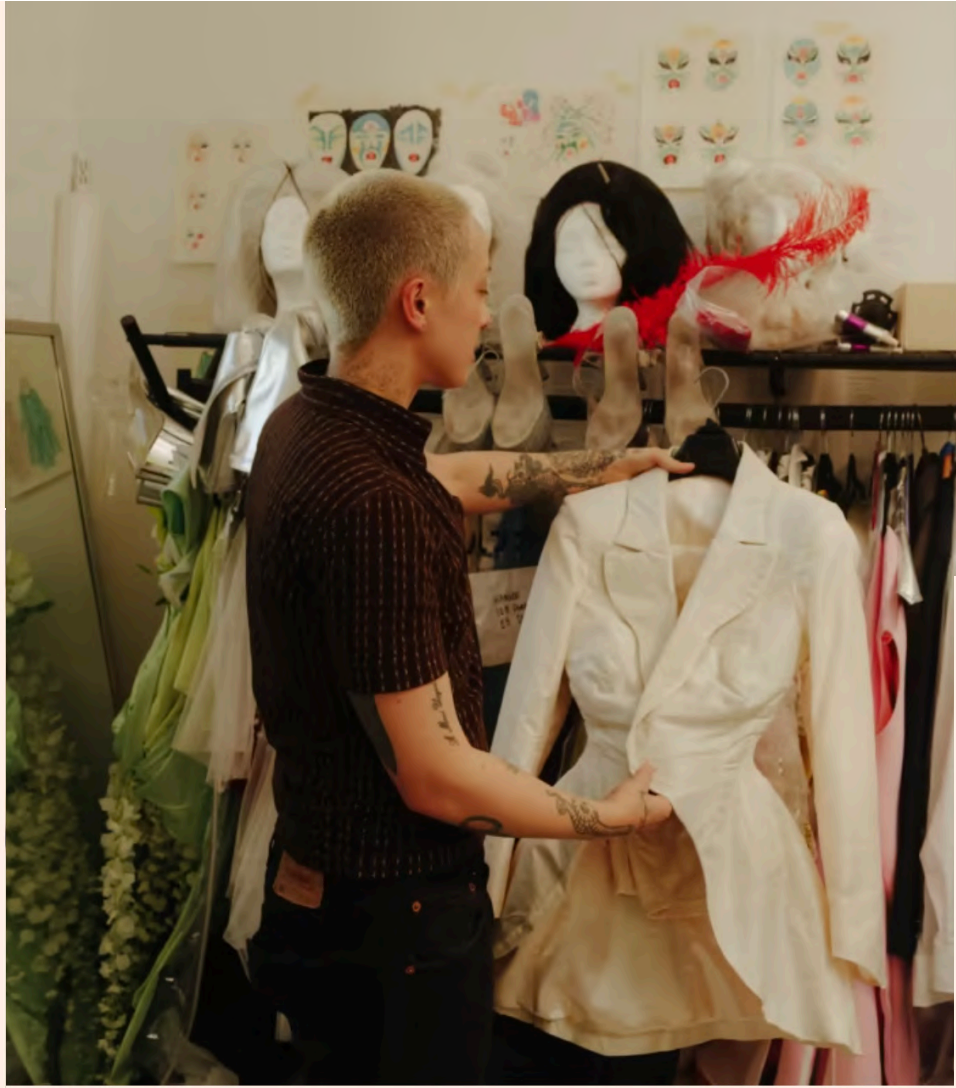


'Embodied Image' (2017) © Courtesy the artist/Soft Opening. Photo: Theo Christelis (2)

“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.

Financial Times, 2023



Sin uses drag to examine dreams



Financial Times, 2023



© 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.

“A Dream of Wholeness in Parts” was Sin’s first foray into longer-form 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 vignettted 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

Financial Times, 2023



© 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

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 young “rising star” artists, 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 Soft Opening and priced between \$7,000-\$18,000. Liza Lacroix, 35, a fellow Canadian artist, sold a new abstract painting on the booth of Gisela Capitain, a dealer from Cologne, Germany, for \$36,000.

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 in 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





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

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

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.

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.

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*

Art Review, 2022

Up there,
watching over you
since 1949

ArtReview



Sin Wai Kin

Art Review, 2022

Sin Wai Kin

by Skye Sherwin



Art Review, 2022

Dreaming of Me





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 ate your wig for breakfast", as the character snipes in *Define Gender*, a 2017 film portrait of the artist. The makeup was just as big: Pierrot-white 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, 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 it is.'"

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

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 purr.

A sweep of the films and sculptures that make up Sin's presentations in two current UK group exhibitions, this year's Turner Prize and *British Art Show 9*, make clear that the artist's vision has expanded

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

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 dream-like 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, colour, sound, 3 min 35 sec. Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London

Art Review, 2022



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

Art Review, 2022



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

Art Review, 2022



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

Art Review, 2022



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

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 made-up 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 their brilliantly creepy take on boybands' off-the-peg appeal, *It's Always You* (2021). Here, the character is 'the serious one' in a four-man 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 face-paint, 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 made-up 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). **ar**

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



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

Cura, 2022

Sin Wai Kin



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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 being 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 beneath 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. At 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 not only standard modes 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 TikTok, 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, as seems 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-the-top 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

A Dream of Wholeness in Parts, 2021. Courtesy: the artist, Cha Wen Gallery, Taipei and Soft Opening, London (p. 246-247)



The Art Newspaper, 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.

The Art Newspaper, 2022



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 reimaged 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.



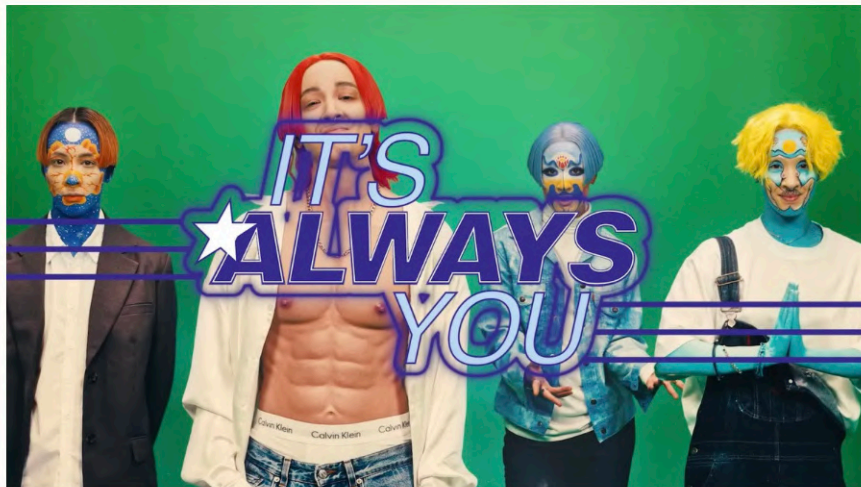
Installation view of Veronica Ryan's *Along a Spectrum* (2021) at Spike Island, Bristol

Commissioned by Spike Island, Bristol and supported by Freelands

The Art Newspaper, 2022

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.

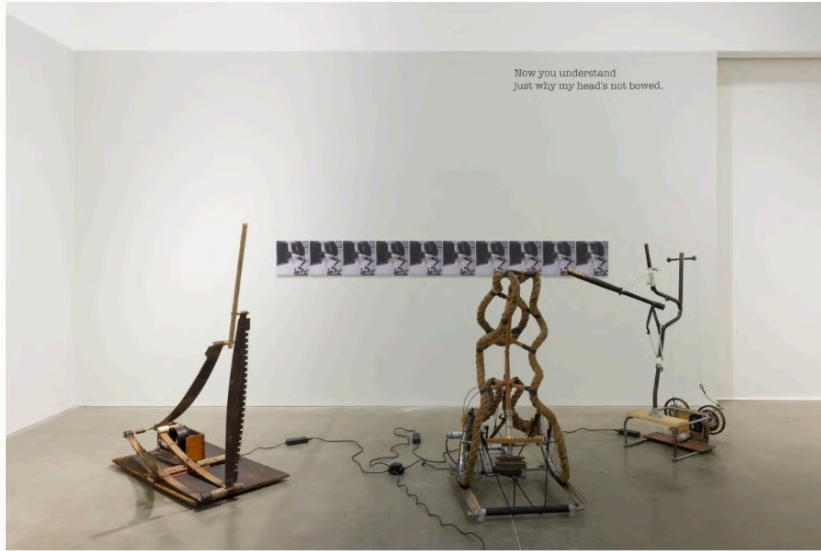


A still from Sin Wai Kin's video *It's Always You* (2021)
Courtesy of the artist and Blindspot Gallery

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

The Art Newspaper, 2022

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 solo exhibition last 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

The Art Newspaper, 2022

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.”

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](#).

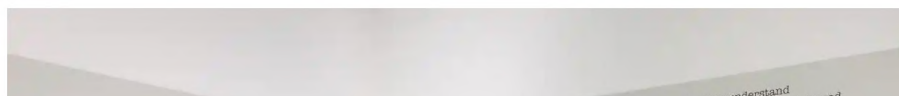
Heather Phillipson joins Ingrid Pollard, Veronica Ryan and Sin Wai Kin on this year's shortlist for the prize, as it returns to Liverpool for the first time in 15 years.

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.

By [Mark Westall](#) • 4 March 2022

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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.

FAD Magazine, 2022

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 Museum.

"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

FAD Magazine, 2022

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 draughtsmanship in Drawing attention."

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 16th century English artist John White (c. ?1539-1593). Dressed in fanciful mythological garb the imagined encounter with a historical Pict (who lived in northern and eastern Scotland during late antiquity) is flavoured by the artist's actual encounter with Indigenous Americans as the first governor of the English colony at Roanoke, Virginia.

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 queer

FAD Magazine, 2022

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 queer 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 mash-up of images, narratives, cultures, and contexts is an appeal to us to envision communities freed from the strictures of binary thinking.

— Nuit Banai

Art Review, 2022

Sin Wai Kin *It's Always You*

Blindspot Gallery, Hong Kong 23 November – 8 January

The ubiquitous motto of Hong Kong's current Canto-pop boyband sensation Mirror reads, 'Together we reflect unlimited possibilities'. Here, a karaoke-style music video of what is presumably a boyband, consisting of four distinctive members performing a choreographed routine, plays on two large screens. The lyrics "I see myself in you reflected back in me. It's always you – you're like infinity" flash across the screen.

This is artist Sin Wai Kin's latest two-channel video, *It's Always You* (2021). It's a sheer coincidence that Sin's latest iteration of their drag persona – assuming the fictitious boyband's four masculine roles – is in sync with Mirror's current pop cultural reign. But while Mirror's name wants us to believe they reflect their true selves through their music, Sin posits the possibility of a fluid and infinite spectrum of identity and the multitudes it can contain. The artist plays the role of The Universe (the pretty boy), The Storyteller (the serious one), The One (the childish one) and Wai King (the heartthrob) – all four members illustrating another line from the video: "Together we're the one, and as one, I'm many".

Formerly known as Victoria Sin – the London-based artist's retired hyperfeminine persona – Sin recently announced they would now go by their gender-neutral Cantonese name. This exhibition traces their journey from Victoria to The Storyteller, the latter a role they performed live for the first time at this minisurvey show's opening.

The exhibition also features *Narrative Reflections on Looking* (2016–17), a series of four films exploring Sin's relationship to images

of idealised femininity – and how fetishising those ideals has become normalised: often clad in shades of pink, red or white, outfitted with feather boas, an alarming amount of bling and an exposed silicone breastplate, Victoria Sin's image is composed of exaggerated conventional feminine attributes.

While Sin is theatrical in appearance, their narration in voiceover and script is subtle and nuanced – the varying inflections in the artist's voice at once seductive but also instructive, similar to the tones found in guided meditation recordings. In striving to deconstruct dichotomies and binaries, Sin presents a hyperbolic female (and later male) construct: "What is she whispering softly in your ear? Sweet nothings?... Let her touch you, comfort you, please you," they croon.

The scripts are sourced from Sin's personal experiences (with psychedelics, for instance) or books (such as Aldous Huxley's 1954 autobiographical *The Doors of Perception*) and films abstracted through a lens of fantasy or science fiction; this is most evident in *The Dream of Wholeness in Parts* (2021), a videowork that charts the artist's transition from feminine to masculine drag. Beginning with Victoria Sin, the masculine character The Universe later emerges; a lotus flower painted on their face alludes to the Jing role type in Cantonese opera, known for their lyrical singing and martial arts.

The artist also draws on Taoist writing, such as the passages 'Butterfly Dream' and 'The Death of Wonton' in Chuang Tzu's eponymous book, written over a thousand years ago. In a particularly arresting scene in *The Dream of*

Wholeness in Parts, the artist wolfs down a bowl of wonton noodles, while a voiceover elaborates on the description, "eating... putting things into a hole in my body and crushing it until it was squished, where I could transform it into energy". The wording evokes imagery from Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction* (1988), an influential text for the artist for its advocacy of alternative narratives for existing and thriving.

Diversifying their narrative approaches, Sin created *Dreambabes 2.0* (2021), a zine showcased at *Just in Case*, a group exhibition at Asia Art Archive that coincides with Blindspot's show. Sin edited the volume and contributed to it (along with other artists), to explore how science and speculative fiction can be used by queer communities to challenge the foundations of storytelling.

The Storyteller, a character created during the pandemic, becomes a key figure in Sin's world of characters, and takes centre stage in the video *Today's Top Stories* (2020). Purposefully glitchy (an aesthetic, perhaps, meant to reflect news media's problematic nature), The Storyteller as news anchor reports polarising perspectives, with the work demonstrating how stories are told to create binaries of objective knowledge in culture.

Culminating in the videowork *It's Always You*, the show comes at a time when K-pop dominates pop culture, bringing with it the illusions of fantasy and escapism. The possibility of change and promise of temporality in Sin's work anticipates the evolution of their persona, invoking the question: what character comes next?

Aaina Bhargava

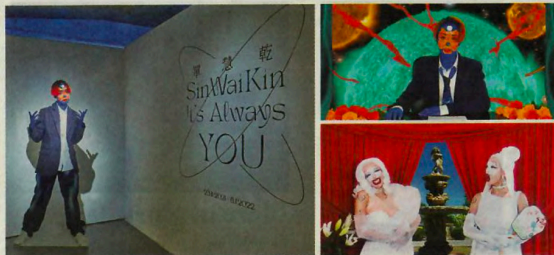


It's Always You (still), 2021, 4K two-channel video, 4 min 5 sec. Courtesy the artist and Blindspot Gallery, Hong Kong

Art Review, 2022



Today's Top Stories (still), 2020, single-channel video,
6 min 30 sec. Courtesy the artist
and Blindspot Gallery, Hong Kong



■ Sin Wai Kin's first solo exhibition in Asia, *It's Always You*, top left, leads visitors into their narratives through, from top right: *Today's Top Stories*; *Irreconcilable Differences*; and *It's Always You*.



Gender bender

Charlie Ng

Human beings love duality: black/white, good/bad, male/female. But not all things in life are that simple – something Canada-born and London-based artist Sin Wai Kin hopes to address in their first solo exhibition in Asia, *It's Always You*.

"We arrive in the world with narratives predetermined, societal scripts existing, and we have to become ourselves within these narratives that we have no choice over," the artist said.

Socially constructed gender identity is one of the many social scripts Sin wants to address. The Canadian identifies as non-binary, preferring to use the third-person pronoun "they/them."

The exhibition brings up less-discussed topics such as drag culture and queer identity using video installations, posters and even make-up wipes.

Formerly known as Victoria Sin, Sin returned to their gender-neutral Chinese birth name, Sin Wai Kin. "I want to explore not only femininity, the ways that I've been socialized with, but also to masculinity, the ways that I want to inhabit."

Sin references Chuang Tzu's Taoist thinking in *Butterfly Dream* and *The Death of Wonton in A Dream of Wholeness in Parts*. "Taoism is about constantly transforming, where positionalities and naming are temporary things."

Gender fluidity is one of the instantly noticeable

themes in *It's Always You*. "The first work that you encounter, *Narrative Reflections on Looking*, is the first time that I was able to bring drag into my work. Narrative cinema gave me control over the way that people were consuming the artworks," they said.

Sin also prioritized storytelling as a crucial component of the video installations. "Storytelling is a really important way for me to redefine these relationships and to center perspectives that are often marginalized, including my own."

As a fan of boybands, Sin saw potential in using the members' characterizations to address the sense of self. "I was thinking of this idea of one body as a multiplicity, one person containing multitudes and being different people at the same or different times, which is something that we all do – we have an active self that we present to any kind of social circumstances, which is different depending on work or with friends and family or alone."

So Sin integrated four separate works – *The Universe (the pretty boy)*, *The Storyteller (the serious one)*, *The One (the childish one)* and *Wai King (the heartthrob)* – to form a boy band, *It's Always You*.

"I was thinking about a community as one body, the idea of solidarity and the whole being more than the sum of its parts. The boyband is a perfect vehicle to talk about that," they said.

Tomorrow is the last day to catch Sin Wai Kin's *It's Always You* at [Blindspot Gallery](#).

Art Asia Pacific, 2022



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

SIN WAI KIN

Self, World, Universe

BY TIFFANY LEUNG

Art Asia Pacific, 2022



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

"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.

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?

It was during a lockdown in 2020 when new perspectives emerged and manifested. Isolated at home, Sin suddenly found themselves 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 themselves repeatedly listening to popular 1990s breakup songs like "I Want You Back" by NSYNC and bingeing 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.

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,

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

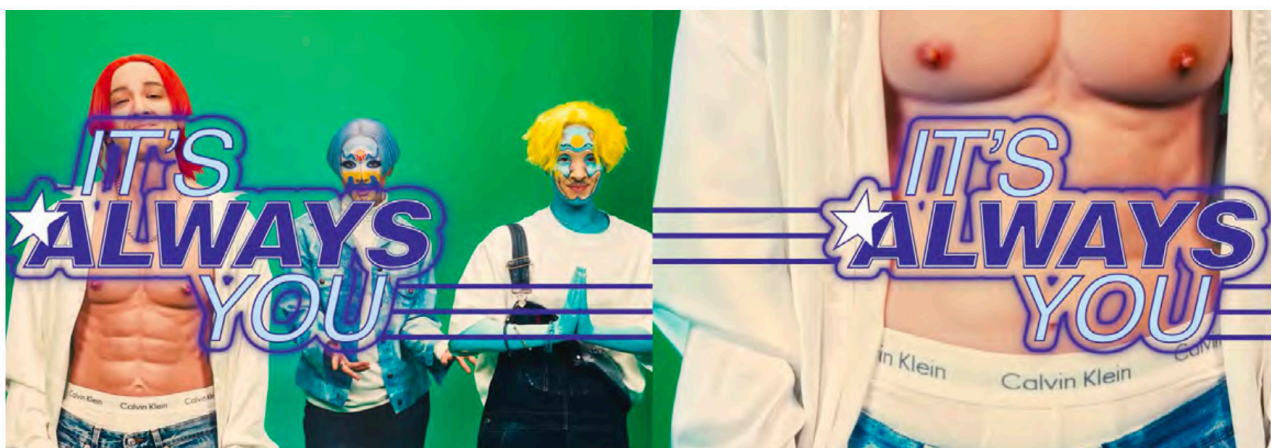
A Dream of Wholeness in Parts (2019–21)—currently touring as part of the British Art Show 9—brings together two of their new alter egos in “a self-contained universe.” Woven together by a speculative narrative and reveries of landscapes, the film takes its inspiration from *Dream of the Butterfly* (c. 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.

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.



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

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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), Toronto-born 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.'

Sin Wai Kin, formerly known as Victoria Sin, identifies as non-binary. Their performances ply apart femininity in order to expose gender as an elaborate social construct – a comedic opera of many composite parts, reliant on myth, performance and spectatorship.

In their latest work, a film titled *A DREAM OF WHOLENESS IN 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 belt with the letters 'R', 'E', 'A', 'L' brandished across the waist – a nod to the ways in which Sin Wai Kin's practice both mocks and heralds language as a technology

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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*

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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

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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?

A 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

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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 almost-identical – 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 eyebrows 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

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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 pre-determined societal scripts. By reimagining these characters and presenting them in new ways, I'm trying to unpick and reassemble these scripts.

Q 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

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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.

Q 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 masc 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 masc character in this performance?

A SIN WAI KIN – *TOTAL FABRICATION* came before *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

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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.

Q 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.

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

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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.

Q 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?

A 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

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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.

Q 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?

A 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 character and the one I describe in *NARRATIVE REFLECTIONS ON LOOKING*, as well as versions of that face where it morphs into 'half faces' – à la *PHANTOM OF 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

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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*.

South China Morning Post, 2021

How BTS and Mirror help Hong Kong artist represent nonbinary genders and fluidity of existence

Boy bands including the K-pop and Canto-pop giants form the central idea behind Sin Wai-kin's new Hong Kong exhibition 'It's Always You'. The non-binary artist plays four different male roles in a fictional boy band, complete with music videos and life-size cut-outs.



Artist Sin Wai-kin at their exhibition "It's Always You", at Blindspot Gallery in Wong Chuk Hang, Hong Kong, which uses boy bands such as BTS and Mirror as a basis to represent non-binary genders. Photo: Jonathan Wong

Halfway through our interview, Sin Wai-kin says they might have played Victoria Sin for the last time in summer 2020. Given that Victoria Sin happens to be the English name of the non-binary artist, who prefers to be referred to by the pronouns "they" and "their", the statement suggests a deeper transformation and is not merely an actor's declaration of putting their most beloved role to bed.

For someone who performs in drag within speculative fictional worlds, "Victoria Sin" and "Sin Wai-kin" (Sin's Chinese birth name, which is not particularly male or female) have also been the artist's main characters embodying different gender and cultural ideals.

The 30-year-old, who describes themselves as being assigned female at birth, performed for years as Victoria Sin, a voluptuous, heavily made-up platinum blonde vixen inspired by Marilyn Monroe and Jessica Rabbit. The artist, born in Toronto to a Chinese father and Caucasian English mother, adopted the camp femininity of drag queens and painted faces reminiscent of Chinese opera characters as a way to question the socially constructed nature of gender, and

South China Morning Post, 2021

the fluidity of identity.



Sin with their work *The One* at Blindspot Gallery. Photo: Jonathan Wong

But for the opening of “It’s Always You”, a solo exhibition at Hong Kong’s Blindspot Gallery, Sin is sticking to being Sin Wai-kin.

It’s Always You is also a boy band “formed” by Sin playing four different male roles. At Blindspot, you will see their music videos and life-size cut-outs.

The idea of using drag to explore Sin’s more masculine side came up during the pandemic, which gave the artist time and space to think more about their art practice.

“Since slipping out of Victoria, I realised that [the possibilities are] infinite,” Sin says. “If drag is a process of undoing the binary of what is and what isn’t me, and through that, working out various desires, then there is no end to it. My work has been about undoing colonial ideas within femininity. I kind of turned round and realised there was this whole unexplored world. What is masculinity?”

Sin endured the three-week mandatory quarantine after flying into Hong Kong from London, where they call home, to perform at the November 20 opening.

Sin appeared as “The Storyteller” at the opening, the “serious one” of the fictional boy band who sometimes appears as a newsreader – to drive home the point about representation versus truth – and whose expressions and gestures invoke Aaron Kwok Fu-shing, one of the “Four Heavenly Kings” of Canto-pop in the 1990s.

South China Morning Post, 2021



Sin with their work Part Two/The Reprise of Cthulhu at Blindspot Gallery. Photo: Jonathan Wong

Sin watched old Hong Kong movies for inspiration on how the band members should act. For example, “The Universe”, who is more flamboyant than “The Storyteller”, is inspired by Hong Kong movie stars Tony Leung Chiu-wai and Leslie Cheung Kwok-wing.

But it is boy bands in general, from N’Sync to BTS and Mirror, that form the central idea behind “It’s Always You”



The fact that we are always in the process of transformation is alarming, but it’s also really liberating
Sin Wai-kin

Sin didn’t know about Mirror, Hong Kong’s recent boy band phenomenon whose faces are currently plastered on billboards across the city, until Nick Yu, the associate director of Blindspot Gallery, sent the artist a link to one of the band’s music videos not long ago. Now Sin is completely obsessed with the Canto-pop sensation.

“Together we reflect unlimited possibilities,” Sin quotes from the band’s Instagram. “Their IG profile description is just so perfect.”

At the same time, boy bands are perfect vehicles for thinking about how we all fit into the rest of the community, Sin adds. “In a boy band, individuals come together to form a whole, which is more than the sum of its parts.”

South China Morning Post, 2021

The exhibition includes dual-screen displays that show the four characters as a group as well as close-ups of each one. These images seem to ask: can “you” as a person exist in a boy band where the individual’s every move is choreographed so it fits within the group?

Sin’s transition from female to male characters is not just about shattering the binary of genders, but a symbol of the fluidity of all existence in Taoist philosophy, something the artist expands on in a work called A Dream of Wholeness in Parts (2021) which invokes Chuang Tzu’s famous “Butterfly Dream” that questions perception and reality.

The constant shifting between characters leaves one wondering where the “real” Sin is. In person, the artist is soft-spoken and gives considered answers after taking the time to consider each question. But is “The Artist Being Interviewed” just another role?

“The fact that we are always in the process of transformation is alarming, but it’s also really liberating,” Sin says. “Drawing a line around yourself and saying ‘this is where I feel comfortable’ – most people do that. But I find every time I step out of that line, I’m also redefining that line. And it is still me. Always me.”



Sin with their work It's Always You at Blindspot Gallery. Photo: Jonathan Wong

Each version of Sin is also a representation of our collective fantasy, hence the title of the exhibition. And a series of works that are imprints of Sin’s make-up on face wipes after drag performances attest to the many identities the artist has embodied.

South China Morning Post, 2021

“I mean, Jessica Rabbit was created by a group of men, who channelled all their desires through this sultry, ultra-feminine character. It’s very interesting ... her gestures, movements, her looks, when what happens in fantasy isn’t grounded in a physical body.”

For now, however, Sin might have enough characters to explore. Who is Sin behind the make-up and the drag? Perhaps they are the carrier of a myriad of selves.

“It’s Always You”, Blindspot Gallery, 5/F, Po Chai Industrial Building, 28 Wong Chuk Hang Road, Wong Chuk Hang, Tue-Sat, 10.30am-6.30pm. Until Jan 8, 2022.

Refleksije o žudnji i pogledu

S Victorijom Sin razgovaramo o izazovima izvedbe *draga* u kontekstu umjetnosti, inscenaciji *queer* žudnje te disruptivnim potencijalima različitih medija.

Razgovarala: Hana Sirovica



Victoria Sin je multimedijalna umjetnica kinesko-kanadskog podrijetla koja živi i radi u Londonu. Studirao je vizualne umjetnosti na *Royal College of Art*, istovremeno razvijajući izvođačke vještine na britanskoj *drag* klupskoj sceni.^[1] Polazeći iz manjinskog iskustva, Sin spaja *drag* kao zabavljačku formu i kao estetsku pojavu, preplićući predodžbe ženstvenosti iz zlatnog doba Hollywooda s vizijama tjelesnosti iz imaginarija znanstvene fantastike. Dvojaka pozicija između *queer* (sup)kulture i "svijeta umjetnosti" obilježava njezin rad, u koji se tako ubrajaju nastupi na manifestacijama poput Venecijanskog bijenala i *NightGowns* večerima u orkestraciji *drag* ikone **Sashe Velour**. Osim vizualnim i izvedbenim umjetnostima, bavi se pisanjem i uredničkim radom, kao i proizvodnjom podcasta i glazbe. Sin će uskoro gostovati u Zagrebu na festivalu Organ Vida, koji se otvara 2. rujna u Muzeju suvremene umjetnosti. Tu smo priliku iskoristili za razgovor o njegovim iskustvima izvedbe *draga* u različitim kontekstima, izazovima inscenacije *queer* žudnje te disruptivnim potencijalima i ograničenjima različitih medija.

KP: U svojim izvedbama često spajaš izvedbene mogućnosti *draga* i jezične potencijale spekulativne fikcije. Voljela bih krenuti od tog odnosa – što povezuje *drag* i znanstvenu fantastiku?

Drag i spekulativna fikcija za mene su bliske jer u obje vidim potencijal za disrupciju postojećih kategorija i uvriježenih ideja o postojanju u društvu. Upravo sam kroz izvedbu *draga* shvatila da nisam žena, *drag* mi je pružio mogućnost pogleda "izvana" i otvorio pogled na svijet koji izvire iz drukčije vrste utjelovljenosti, unatoč tomu što se radi o iznimno izvedbenom, naglašeno teatralnom okviru s vrlo jasnom podjelom između izvedbe i publike. Kada sam u *dragu*, izgledam potpuno drukčije, pa me i okolina tretira drukčije nego kada sam u svojoj svakodnevnoj utjelovljenosti. Primjerice, kada bih posjećivala klubove u *dragu*, ljudi bi obično pretpostavili da se ispod nalazi bijeli cis muškarac. Odjednom bi me tretirali drukčije, maknuli bi se s puta i oslobodili mi prostor. *Drag* mi je pomogao da shvatim koliko me drugi promatraju kroz kategorije, da osvijestim kako vizualni jezik kojim se predstavljamo ima sasvim konkretne učinke u svijetu koji nas okružuje.

Srž *draga* nalazi se u mogućnosti igre s kategorijama i pozicijama, a slično je i sa znanstvenom fantastikom. Taj žanr zamišlja situacije i okoline koje nadilaze ili preosmišljavaju ograničenja postojećih povijesnih, političkih i društvenih infrastruktura. I dalje od toga, znanstvena fantastika omogućava da zamislimo kako bi bilo živjeti u drukčijim uvjetima. Često u tom smislu spominjem prvi roman **Ursule le Guin** koji sam pročitao, *Ljudi bez ičega*. Njegova je radnja smještena na dva različita planeta. Na jednom od njih postoji anarhosindikalistički politički poredak, dok je drugi kapitalistički. Prateći kretanje likova između različitih svjetova, možemo zamisliti kako bi bilo vidjeti kapitalistički sustav iz drukčijeg konteksta, i vidjeti koliko bi potresno to moglo biti. Tako se stvara mogućnost pogleda izvana, pogleda koji polazi iz točke koja omogućuje da shvatimo koliko je ono što smatramo "normalnim" konstrukt. A onda se možda pojavi i osjećaj da stvari mogu postati drukčijima, kao i da postoji mnogo problema u našem odnosu sa svijetom koji nas okružuje.

Rad u *dragu* i rad sa spekulativnom fikcijom promijenili su način na koji razmišljam i pružili mi novu perspektivu, no, iako sam osjećala koliko su mi oboje važni, kao i da su međusobno srodni, u početku je bilo teško razlučiti gdje i kako se točno dodiruju. Tako je prošlo prilično vremena dok ih nisam uspjela spojiti i konačno počela doživljavati *drag* kao utjelovljenu spekulativnu fikciju. U izvedbama rabim puno različitih kazališnih sredstava kako bih predstavila priču i omogućila publici da uroni u nju, dok *drag* uvijek donosi dozu ironije. A svaku priču koju pišem i izvodim, izvodim namigujući, uz odmak koji nagoviješta kako je riječ tek o jednoj od mogućih perspektiva.



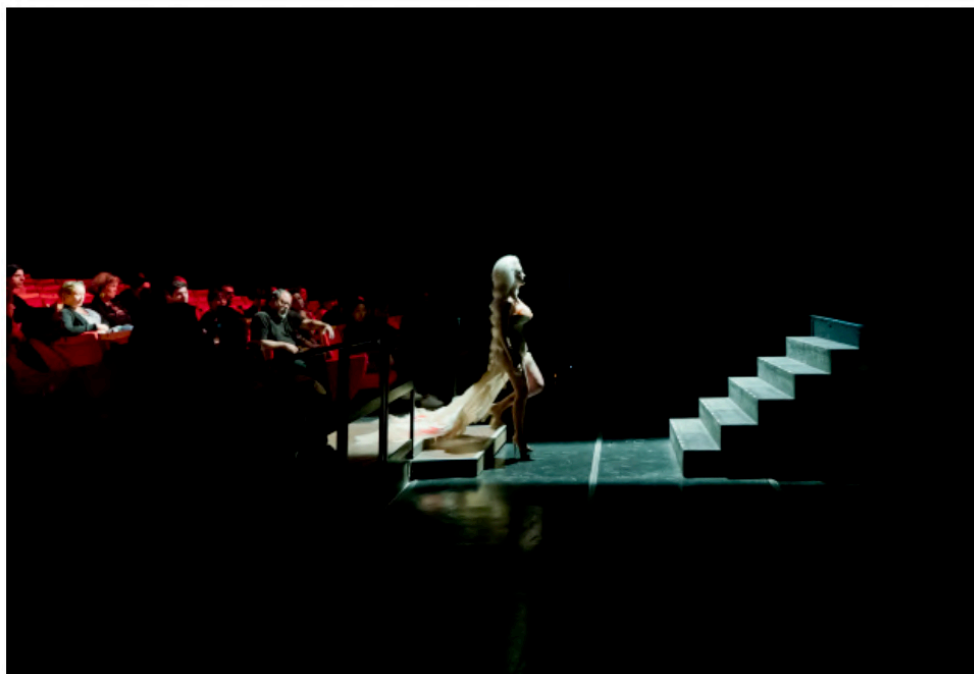
KP: Radiš i nastupaš u vrlo različitim kontekstima – muzejima i galerijama s jedne strane, a s druge u klupskim prostorima *drag* scene. Jesu li tvoja umjetnička i *drag* praksa otpočeta isprepletene ili si ih držao odvojenima? Drugim riječima – kako si uveo *drag* u svoju umjetnost? Gdje i kada su se prvi put susrele, a kako se danas nadopunjuju?

Prilično sam dugo držala *drag* podalje od svoje umjetničke prakse, unatoč tomu što sam se njima istovremeno ozbiljnije počela baviti, istražujući iste teme. Identitet, rod, materijalnost i ironija prisutni su otpočeta u mojoj umjetnosti, no prije sam ih istraživao posredstvom objekata, a ne tijela. Paralelno s time zalazila sam u klubove, uređivala se, igrala se s odnosom tijela, vizualnog i izvedbenog jezika. Prostor umjetnosti, a pogotovo umjetničkog obrazovanja, bio je vrlo strejt i dijelila sam ga s ljudima s kojima nisam imala dodirnih točaka.

kulturpunkt.hr, 2020

Umjetničke institucije još su uvijek iznimno bjelačke i kolonijalne, heteronormativne i patrijarhalne, i osjećala sam kako je *drag* nešto što zaista moram odnjevovati prije no što se odvažim pokazati ga u prostoru koji je toliko strog.

S druge strane, smatram kako trebamo biti jako pažljivi kad govorimo o LGBTIQ+ zajednici jer su se mnogi gej klubovi također pokazali kao vrlo strogi. Ipak, u njima barem postoji razumijevanje i shvaćanje *draga* jer je to jednostavno dio kulture. *Drag* je za mene nešto iznimno osobno, uz pomoć *draga* shvatio sam da nisam tko sam mislio da jesam, i to nije nešto čemu sam se tada mogao olako izložiti. Nisam ih spojio do kraja studija, sve do *Narativnih refleksija o gledanju*, rada koji ću predstaviti u Zagrebu. U tom sam radu napokon pronašao način da uvedem *drag* u svoju umjetničku praksu, i to sam učinio sredstvima narativnog filma. Tek nakon toga u umjetničkim sam prostorima počela raditi na izvedbama koje uključuju *drag*. Uvijek se trudim imati na umu kako kontekst umjetnosti instrumentalizira *drag*, *queer* kulturu i općenito prikaze drugosti, i neprestano tražim načine da ih u tom kontekstu prikažem, a da oni ne postanu objektima fetišizacije, da ih se ne gleda kao *freak show* ili nešto "zanimljivo". Shvatila sam da to mogu ostvariti pomoću narativnog filma. U njemu je moguće kontrolirati kako tijelo postaje slikom, a onda u određenoj mjeri i upravljati recepcijom te slike. Još je jedna mogućnost kojoj sam se okrenuo u *Narativnim refleksijama*: u samoj naraciji stvoriti svijest o uvriježenim načinama konzumacije slike, posebno prikaza ženstvenosti te zauzeti taj prostor i izokrenuti pogled koji njime dominira.



KP: Spomenula si dvije vrste prostora svog rada – institucionalne i klupske, kao i to da u njima prisutne različite norme i ograničenja. Možeš li nam reći više o tomu kako se razlikuju? Gdje se osjećaš ugodnije, a gdje nam preostaje više *queer* posla?

Uvijek preostaje puno posla, nijedan prostor nije utopijski. Da budem iskren, dugo nisam nastupao u noćnim klubovima; već neko vrijeme izvodim isključivo u umjetničkim prostorima. Osim što su ti prostori međusobno potpuno različiti, važno je imati na umu kako su razlozi dolaska publike također vrlo različiti, kao i da će na potpuno različite načine gledati to što se pred njima nalazi ili za njih izvodi. U *queer* klupske, kabaretske prostore ljudi dolaze prvenstveno zbog zabave. Dio razloga može biti i kritičnost, no glavna je motivacija zabava i osjećaj zajedništva. Nasuprot tomu, način gledanja u umjetničkim je prostorima potpuno drukčiji. Ljudi u njih zalaze prije svega da bi bili kritični, a tek onda da bi se možda i zabavili. A kada su ljudi negdje prvenstveno da bi bili kritični, i k tomu u kontekstu koji je toliko kolonijalan i patrijarhalan, nerijetko i homofoban i transfoban, tada i rad s kojim će se susresti mora biti potpuno različit.

Osim toga, potpuno su drukčiji vremenski i financijski okviri – u *drag* kabaretskim prostorima nema budžeta za produkciju, ne postoji dulji period za razvoj rada. Nastupi uobičajeno traju tek nekoliko minuta, izlazak na scenu prati nastup koji treba biti dovoljno upadljiv i raskošan da bi zaplijenio pažnju publike, a sve vrlo brzo završi. Spomenut ću primjer izvedbe koju sam razvila specifično za takav kabaretski prostor, a izgledala je tako da pet minuta slažem sendvič uz glazbenu pozadinu. Riječ je o vrlo jednostavnoj izvedbi i u njoj su svi postupci pomno usklađeni s glazbom. Poruka je prilično jasna, a vremena ima za razvoj tek jedne radnje. S druge strane, kada sam dobio priliku raditi u umjetničkim prostorima na duljim izvedbama koje mogu potrajati i čitav sat, najednom sam mogao uključiti svoje tekstove i rabiti dugačke kontemplativne stanke. Primjerice, mogao sam nepomično stajati punih šest minuta, a da to poprimi neko posebno značenje. Općenito mislim da je važno da umjetnici i umjetnice svjesno pristupaju kontekstima u kojima izlažu, kao i recepciji svog rada - treba promišljati kako najbolje iskazati to što želiš u određenoj okolini.

KP: Drago mi je da si spomenuo poziranje jer se iduće pitanje nadovezuje na temu objektivacije i njezinog odnosa s *dragom*, ženstvenošću i žudnjom. Krenula bih od konkretnog primjera iz tvoje izvedbe *The Sky as an Image, An Image as a Net*. U jednom prizoru dugo nepomično poziraš, dok publika čuje tvoj glas kako secira vlastitu fascinaciju figurom plave seks-bombe. U tom prizoru spominješ nešto što zoveš "lezbijaska dilema", koju opisuješ kao neodlučnost oko toga želiš li biti s nekom osobom ili postati nalik njoj. Odakle dolazi ta dilema – i koliko je oblikovala tvoju *drag* osobu?

Odgovor ima veze s istraživanjem *queer* žudnje, a pitanje me podsjetilo na tekst *Trans Desire* **Miche Cardenas**, u kojem autorica tvrdi kako objektivacija nije samo uperena tijelu, osobi ili stvari koju gledamo, već kroz nju istovremeno zamišljamo i sebe naspram tog objekta. Drugim riječima, kad objektiviramo, činimo to i spram sebe samih, pa je odnos između objekata gotovo jednako važan kao objekti koji ga čine.

Konkretni citat na koji se referiraš proizišao je iz moje opsesije **Amandom Lepore**, trans ženom koja izgleda naprosto fantastično. Ona uvijek ima savršeno oblikovanu platinastu kosu, nosi haljine u potpunosti sastavljene od dijamantnih kristala, a njezine konture godinama je pomno oblikovala plastična kirurgija. Često se hvali kako ima najskuplje tijelo na svijetu. Radi se o iznimno ekstravagantnoj slici ženstvenosti, specifično bjelačke holivudske ženstvenosti u figuri plave seks-bombe. Postao sam njome potpuno opsjednut i provodio sate promatrajući njezine slike, a sve u nemogućnosti da shvatim gdje bih ju smjestio u vlastitoj žudnji. Prvo, htio sam postati ona. U mom ranijem *dragu* prilično je očito da sam htio eksplodirati utjelovljujući tu predodžbu bjelačke ženstvenosti, baš kao što je to učinila Amanda Lepore. Tijekom života, uvijek su me spram bjelačke ženstvenosti promatrali drugi, ali i ja sebe samu; i ta je vrsta ženstvenosti uvijek figurirala kao nedostižni ideal. Htjela sam ju preuzeti, vidjeti dokle ide, dokazati da to mogu učiniti i pokazati da ju zatim mogu skinuti. No, bio sam zbunjen *želim li biti njome ili želim biti s njom*. To je citat iz izvedbe, to je lezbijaska dilema. I riječ je o nečemu što me zbunjuje dan-danas. Nedavno sam prošla veliku transformaciju, kada sam prvi put nakon 14 godina počela nositi maskuliniju frizuru. Istovremeno se moja žudnja promijenila i prvi put osjećam privlačnost prema ženstvenijim osobama. Stvarno ne znam, najiskrenije, nemam odgovor na tvoje pitanje, no on

sigurno ima veze s doživljajem roda i žudnje kao fluidnih pojava, pojava koje se mogu promijeniti i koje nemaju jasne granice. Sada mislim kako sve zajedno čak i nije lezbijska dilema, već je riječ o *queer* dilemi.

Jednom kad shvatimo da ništa nije binarno, da je seksualnost u jednakoj mjeri konstrukt koliko je to i rod, mogućnosti koje se otvaraju beskrajne su.



KP: Osim iz zapadnjačkih predodžbi idealne ženstvenosti i imaginarija znanstvene fantastike, za svoj rad crpiš elemente iz brojnih drugih kulturnih izvora. Među njima se ističu pornografija i *queer* umjetničke prakse. Zašto su ti važne baš te tradicije i kako, u općenitom smislu, biraš izvore s kojima stupaš u dijalog?

Uživam u izboru različitih referenci, volim ih pomiješati i promatrati što iz toga proizlazi. Ako govorimo o kulturnim izvorima, u posljednje sam se vrijeme odmaknuo od zapadnjačkih prikaza ženstvenosti jer osjećam kako sam ih dovoljno iscrpio. Te sam prikaze, zajedno sa žudnjom za njihovim utjelovljenjem, na neki način egzorcirao iz svog tijela i uma, a kad sam ih uspio dokrajčiti (ili barem primiriti), pomislio sam – "u redu, što je sljedeće"?

Tražeći načine proširenja svoje prakse, okrenuo sam se izvedbama roda i identiteta u kantonskoj operi. Riječ je o prvom primjeru *queer* reprezentacije u kineskoj kulturi s kojim sam se susrela. U tom je izvedbenom obliku uobičajeno da žene igraju muške uloge, kao i da na

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pozornici sudjeluju u romantičnim zapletima uz žene koje igraju ženske uloge. Odrastala sam uz baku koja je uvijek pjevala karaoke kantonske opere, a njezine su najdraže izvođačice bile dvije žene koje su na sceni uvijek igrale romantične partnere. Vizualni jezik kantonske i pekinške opere nevjerojatan je i iznimno složen. Primjerice, boje maski ili crteži na licima glumaca ili glumica signaliziraju važnost lika koji utjelovljuju i pokazuju radi li se o ženi ili muškarcu, ratniku ili klaunu. Osim što ukazuju na arhetip lika, vizualni znakovi otkrivaju i njegov karakter, koji može biti dobar ili zao. U svakom smislu čini mi se kako se radi o savršenom mediju za propitivanje društveno predodređenih scenarija.



Nakon što sam dugo stvarao vrlo specifične idealizacije bjelačke ženstvenosti, one su me počele gušiti, morao sam krenuti novim smjerovima, stoga je i moj *drag* postao bliži znanstvenoj fantastici. Primjerice, spoj pornografije i znanstvene fantastike dobar je način za preosmišljavanje opirođenih ideja o seksualnosti kakve pornografija potvrđuje, a njihovo je djelovanje nasilno po bilo koju marginaliziranu skupinu, bilo da se radi o ženama, nebijelim osobama ili trans ljudima. Važan mi je utjecaj pornografije upravo stoga što je seksualnost, kao što sam već spomenula, nešto što se uči i stvara u društvu. Kombinacija SF-a i pornografije omogućuje da stvorimo različite okolnosti i odnose između likova, a njihovi odnosi prema svijetu onda također mogu biti drukčiji. Nekoliko me autora i autorica u tomu inspiriralo, najviše **Shu Lea Cheang**, tajvanska umjetnica koja je 2000. napravila film *IKU*, te **Eric Pussyboy**, autor pornografske serije *Neurosex Pornoia* u kojoj glume trans osobe. Radi se o vrlo niskobudžetnoj, uradi-sam produkciji,

a estetika B filma doprinosi zaigranosti. Baš poput draga i znanstvene fantastike, i ove se pojave isprva mogu činiti nespojivima, dok u nekom trenutku ne shvatimo da je sve povezano, a tada odnosi postanu važniji od samih stvari.

KP: Nakon početaka u vizualnoj umjetnosti, okrenuo si se filmu i performansu, dok u posljednje vrijeme sve više radiš sa zvukom i glazbom. Možeš li objasniti ovu putanju duž različitih medija?

Oduvijek je u mojim izvedbama prisutna glazba, baš kao što u je mom filmskom radu i radu s objektima stalno prisutna izvedbenost. Radi se o njihovoj drukčijoj raspodjeli, a sve kako bi se ispitalo što je sve moguće postići posredstvom različitih medija. Zanimljivo je također osvrnuti se u ovom smislu i na *Narativne refleksije o gledanju*. Dok je performans savršen medij za promišljanje utjelovljenosti, film je savršen medij za ispitivanje vizualnog jezika, čija se formacija tijekom filmske povijesti u mnogo navrata pokazala kao nasilni proces. Svaki medij dodaje novi sloj značenja, a uvijek tražim najprikladniji način za razračun s problemima, strukturama i sistemima na koje pokušavam ukazati. Svoj sam rad općenito usmjerila slici u toliko velikoj mjeri jer je ona prvo što ljudi zamjećuju. Čak i moj rad sa zvukom obično uključuje iznimno vizualne opise, no znam da ne postoji dvoje ljudi koji će zamisliti istu sliku i to mi je jako zanimljivo.

KP: Radila si s umjetnicama i umjetnicima koji pripadaju potpuno različitim glazbenim izričajima. Kako pristupaš tim suradnjama?

U izvedbama *The Sky as an Image, an Image as a Net* i *A View from Elsewhere* surađivala sam s producenticom **Shy One**. Ona je skladala glazbu koja prati čitave izvedbe, pomalo poput mjuzikla, a unutar svakog *soundtracka* postoje pojedinačne pjesme koje se mogu remiksati i predstaviti u različitim kontekstima. To nam je omogućilo da izvedbe koje smo izvorno zamislile za galerijske prostore prilagodimo različitim okolnostima i usput se poigramo idejom pop zvijezde. Zato smo mogle prijeći u klupske i koncertne prostore, što je doživjelo svoj vrhunac na njujorškom koncertu **Yaeji** u Knockdown centru, kada smo nastupale kao predgrupa za publiku od 3000 ljudi. Održale smo izvedbe i na Red Bull Music Festivalu u Londonu te u Palais Tokyo u Parizu. Prošle godine s nekoliko sam instrumentalista surađivala na izvedbi *If I had the words to tell you we wouldn't be here now*, koja je imala

kulturpunkt.hr, 2020

specifične varijante u vrlo različitim kontekstima – u galeriji Chi-Wen u Taipeiju, na Venecijanskom bijenalu, u MOCA-i u Torontu i francuskom FRAC Lorraine.

Ta izvedba bavi se jezikom i njegovim nedostacima, teškoćom govora o osjećajima i onomu što se nalazi onkraj jezičnih kategorija. Istražuje tezu prema kojoj je iznimno teško misliti o svemu za što nemamo ime. Jezik stvara i potvrđuje kategorije i sustave, a kada govorimo doslovce opredmećujemo i potvrđujemo odnose moći. Primjerice, povijesti kolonizacije, kapitalizma, patrijarhat (...) toliko su duboko ukorijenjeni u engleskom da je nevjerojatno teško na tom jeziku izgovoriti nešto što bi bilo zaista queer, feministički ili postkolonijalno. Zbog toga sam se okrenuo zvuku, kako bih stvorio (ili bar pokušao stvoriti) zaobilazni put. Sonačni jezik, kao svi drugi jezici (govorni, vizualni ili pisani), posljedica je kulture u kojoj nastaje. Zato sam u suradnji s različitim glazbenicima tražila izraze koji bi bili primjereni određenom kontekstu. Dok smo u Taipeiju radili s instrumentom koji se zove pipa i nešto je poput kineske lutnje, u Veneciji sam surađivao s baroknim flautistom, u Torontu s udaraljkašicom, a u Francuskoj smo radili uz harmoniku koja je instrument pučke glazbe te regije. U posljednje vrijeme producirala sam nekoliko elektroničkih dionica za skladbe koje se bave snovima i znanstvenom fantastikom, pokušavajući stvoriti zvukove koji nas mogu voditi alternativnim svjetovima ili bar zakomplicirati ovaj u kojemu živimo.



KP: Vratimo se na kraju tehnologijama gledanja i radu koji ćeš predstaviti u Zagrebu. Iako *Narativne refleksije o gledanju* izlažeš u galerijama i muzejima, inzistiraš da se taj rad određuje kao film, umjesto (očekivane) kategorije videorada. Radi li se ponovno o načinu da ukažeš na određenu tradiciju?

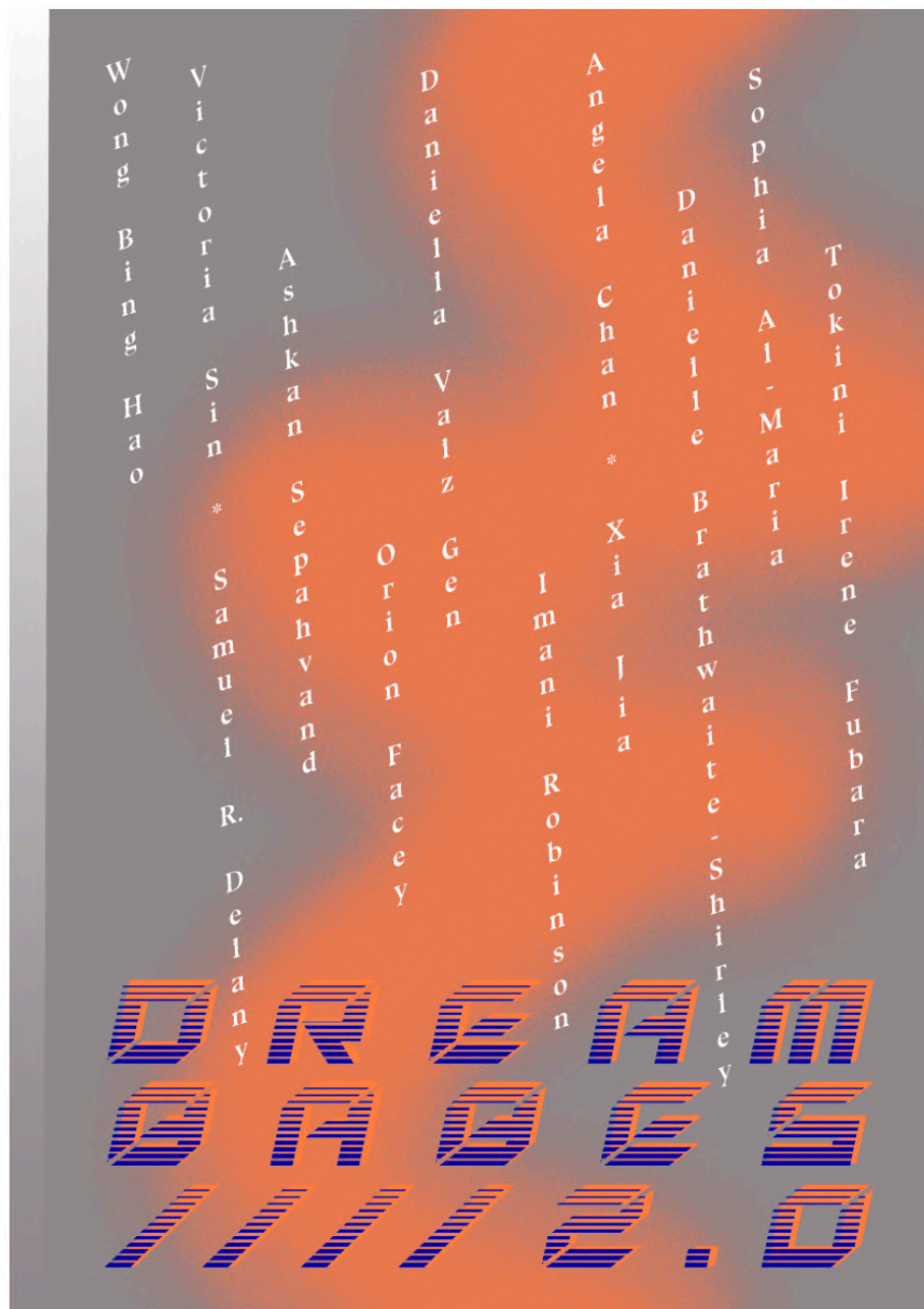
Svakako, inzistiram na kategoriji filma jer taj je rad pokušaj da utjelovim filmski jezik. Njime sam htjela pokazati kako filmski medij stvara jezik koji potvrđuje kategorije roda – u smislu opreke muškarac/žena, ali i ženstveno/maskulino - a onda i utvrđuje kakav je izgled i oblik tih kategorija i tko ih smije i može utjeloviti. Film je nekoć bio u središtu moje prakse, a nakon što sam se okrenula performansu, ponovno se vraćam filmu. Za *Narativne refleksije o gledanju* važan je utjecaj eseja *Vizualni užitak i narativni film* **Laure Mulvey**. Riječ je o glasovitom feminističkom tekstu. Ipak, u njemu su prisutne vrlo krute rodne uloge, dok danas znamo da je rod fluidan, da postoji u mnoštvenosti, kao i da su putanje pogleda kompleksnije od toga da su muškarci ti koji promatraju, dok su žene objekti njihova pogleda. Držim kako uvijek postoji potreba za raščinjavanjem obrazaca gledanja kojima nas uče pomoću ekrana. A naša iskustva neprestano posreduju ekrani, pogotovo u ovoj pandemiji kada često ne možemo dijeliti fizički prostor. Učinilo mi se kako je došlo vrijeme da se vratim mehanizmima koji stvaraju i posreduju slike, a zauzvrat i sve nas. Stoga sam uzbuđena što ću se u sljedećem radu, koji ću prikazati iduće zime na *British Art Showu*, ponovno vratiti filmu.

[1]Victoria Sin izjašnjava se kao rodno nebinarna osoba i shodno tome u engleskom jeziku koristi množinu i zamjenice *they/them/their*. Budući da u hrvatskom jeziku ne postoji adekvatna alternativa, u prijevodu variramo ženske i muške oblike.

Ovaj članak objavljen je u sklopu projekta *Obrisi zamišljenog zajedništva* koji je sufinanciran sredstvima Fonda za poticanje pluralizma i raznovrsnosti elektroničkih medija.

The Publishers Fusing Poetry With Art

In recent years, the generative relationship between poetry and art has become increasingly clear. We share a selection of small presses to familiarize yourself with, producing zines, podcasts, erotic fan fiction and more. Words by Rosalind Duguid



Elephant, 2020

PSS

In October of last year, interdisciplinary publisher PSS launched Dream Babes 2.0, the second iteration of Victoria Sin's scintillating queer speculative fiction magazine. Featuring poetry, fiction, essays and artwork from artists and writers including Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley, Wong Bing Hao and Sophia Al-Maria, the publication asserted the importance of sci-fi in imagining stranger, better future worlds. The press operates on a more irregular basis, often releasing works in tandem with events such as Boundary + Gesture at Wysing Art Centre, for which it produced three pamphlets by Imani Robinson, Taylor Le Melle and Rowan Powell, which interrogated ideas around property, possession, transference, object and testimony.

The Art Newspaper, 2020

Top Shanghai nightclub throws post-pandemic 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-or-break 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.

Sleek, 2020

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, sci-fi, fanzines and Cantonese opera, writes
Lola Olufemi

11 March, 2020



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.”

Sleek, 2020



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.*”

Sleek, 2020

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.

Sleek, 2020

"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 eye-opening 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.

Sleek, 2020



The interdisciplinary 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").

Sleek, 2020

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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-

Sleek, 2020

turn 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

Sleek, 2020

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 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

A view from elsewhere: Ten 'Chinese' Contemporary Artists

Toronto born and London based, **Victoria Sin** works across performance, moving image, writing and print. Within these mediums, they focus on cultivating speculative narratives surrounding desire, identification and objectification, using drag as the predominant means of engagement. Drawing closely from their personal experience, Sin's works often touch upon their mix-race family. The artist's deliberate reference to their Asian/Chinese background in several works, with *If I had the words to tell you we wouldn't be here now* (2019) as an example, displaces the ultra-whiteness of their drag character while casting light on the predominantly marginalised and invisible.

With its title borrowed from [Victoria Sin's eponymous book](#) (2018), this blog post intends to challenge the public's normative perception of 'Chinese art' and sketch out an alternative path to the contemporary artists who themselves or whose works relate to China or Chinese to various degrees and in various ways. It is hoped that the discussion above can move the term away from a label that evokes a narrow, nationalist imagination or cultural stereotypes, and instead open up its possibility to operate as a prism that refracts not only specific social issues but also broader human experiences.

Canadian Art, 2019

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 Victoria Sin 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.

Canadian Art, 2019

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 Serpentine Gallery's 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 PHILE Magazine, sat down with Sin ahead of the opening of "Age of You" to reflect on the driving forces of their rich speculations.



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.

Canadian Art, 2019

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 hour-long 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.

Canadian Art, 2019

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.



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

Canadian Art, 2019

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.

Canadian Art, 2019

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.

Canadian Art, 2019

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.

Canadian Art, 2019



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.

Artsy, 2019

Victoria Sin

B. 1991, Toronto. Lives and works in London.



Victoria Sin by Bernice Mulenga. Courtesy of the artist.



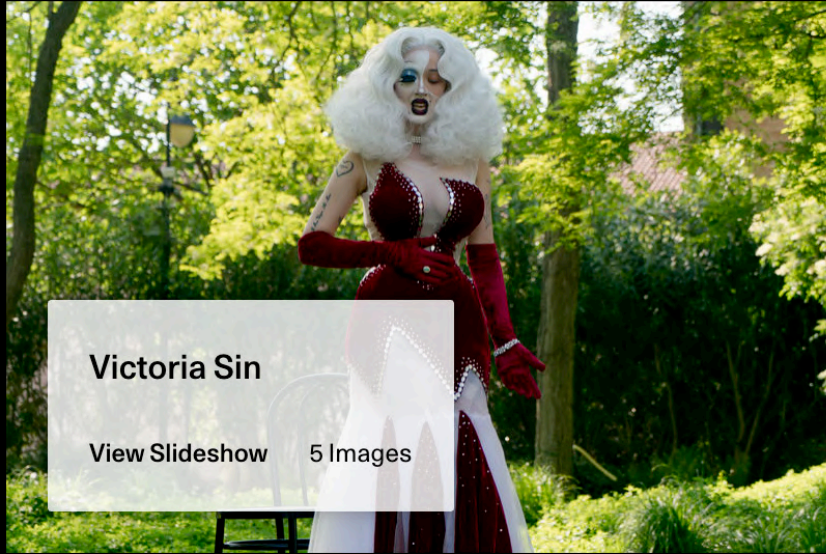
Victoria Sin

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.

Artsy, 2019



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.



Artsy, 2019



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 art-world 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

Artsy, 2019

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 lip-synched 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.

Ocula, 2019

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

Ocula, 2019

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 Institute of Contemporary Art, 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.

Ocula, 2019



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.

Ocula, 2019



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 Taipei, *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 Misa'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

Ocula, 2019

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.

Ocula, 2019

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?

Ocula, 2019

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.

Ocula, 2019



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/anti-national/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

Ocula, 2019

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 Taipei Dangdai [18–20 January 2019]. I'll be working with Taiwanese pipa player Peiju Lien, in

Ocula, 2019

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.

Ocula, 2019



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

Ocula, 2019

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.

Ocula, 2019

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]

Dazed, 2019

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

Dazed, 2019

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

Dazed, 2019

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

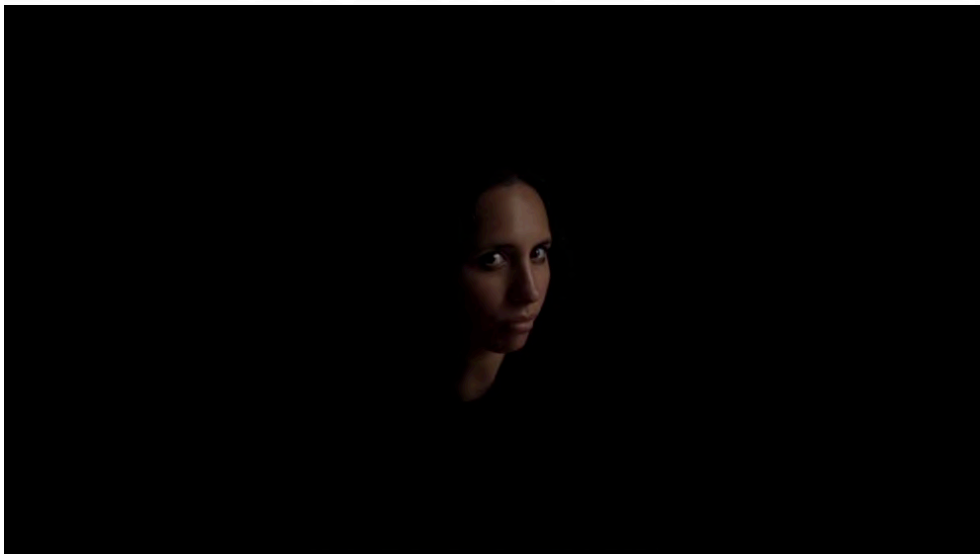
How did you first come across each other?

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.

Dazed, 2019

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.'

Dazed, 2019

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 your 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.

Dazed, 2019

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.

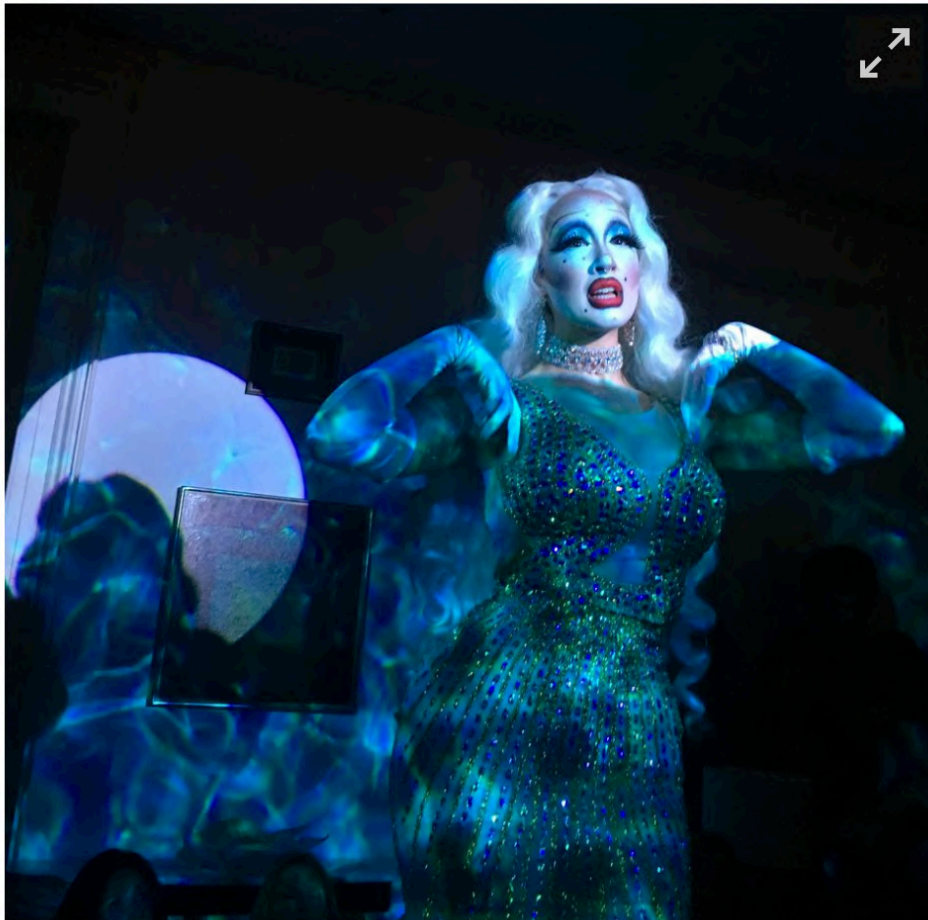


Sophia Al-Maria, "Black Friday" (2016). Digital Video Installation view. Whitney Museum of American Art. Courtesy Third Line Gallery

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 themselves 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.

Dazed Beauty, 2018

As well as being a bronzed sex goddess, 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 oddly beautiful old make-up wipes), through to mesmerising video work (side note: check out the Nowness film 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.

Dazed Beauty, 2018

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.

Dazed Beauty, 2018

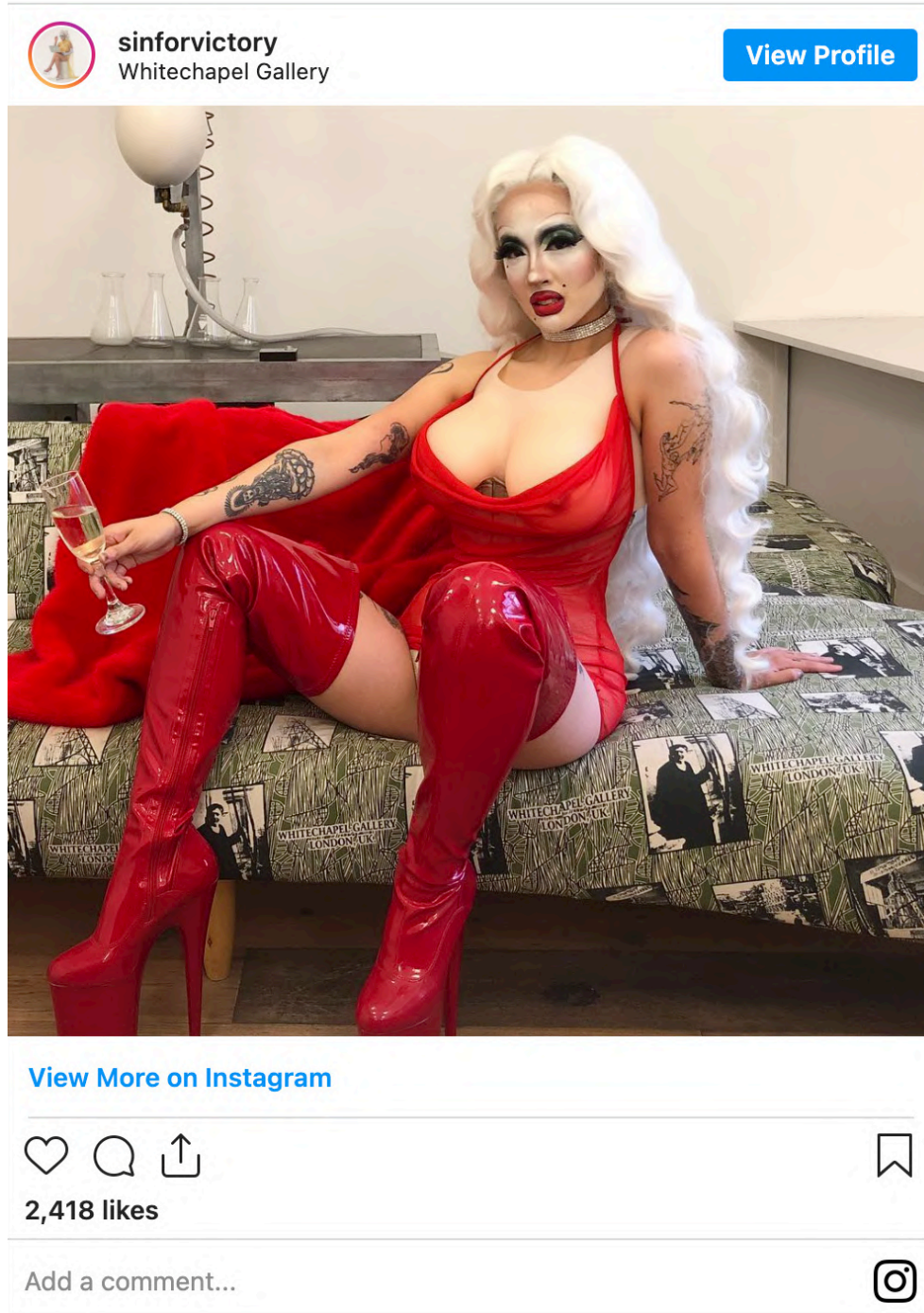
Has that made you see your form of drag differently? Has that affected your drag rather than just the spaces you perform in?

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.

Dazed Beauty, 2018



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

Dazed Beauty, 2018

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."

Dazed Beauty, 2018

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...

Victoria Sin: Yeah, it was before Miss Fame was on *Drag Race*.

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.

Dazed Beauty, 2018



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

Yes!

Victoria Sin: But there was something else as well in the transformation. It's like a really special intimate time when there's this moment between identities. Because when I'm not in drag I'm still performing something but in a way that I'm less conscious of, and when I'm in drag I'm performing an identity that's very constructed purposefully, but both of them are identities that have been carved out over a period of time. And that time in between is like limbo.

Dazed Beauty, 2018

Yeah I feel that.

Victoria Sin: Yeah and the limbo is almost like the most interesting place, you know?

When you've got one eyebrow on and you're like "Who am I!"

Victoria Sin: Ha!

No, but completely, it's a vulnerable place. It's somewhere where you're confronted with yourself and you're almost forced to see part of yourself come into existence that you may suppress in other situations. I feel stronger in those situations. It's almost like a battery recharging.

Victoria Sin: Yes, that is a really perfect way to describe it actually. You're confronted, and also for me when you're in drag and you're out of drag, I have a better perspective of what the other identity is doing. It was through doing drag and leaving my everyday persona behind that I could look at it and be like: "That's not a woman," you know. "That's not who I am, that's not where I place myself". I think that doing both inform the other.

What would you say to someone going through the transition who may have similar intersections to yourself?

Victoria Sin: That you have just as much right to be here as any of these other queens, and your voice and your perspective as someone on the intersection, as someone who doesn't usually get the gigs or isn't validated or respected by a lot of the community, that is what will make you powerful, and what will make your voice more important.

DEAR @TRIXIEMATTEL ... 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](https://pic.twitter.com/N15UGYAHBZ)

Dazed Beauty, 2018

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

Dazed Beauty, 2018

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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571 likes



Dazed Beauty, 2018

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.

Victoria Sin: 'A lot of drag is misogynistic but for me gender is the butt of the joke, not women'

EVENING STANDARD ARTS IN ASSOCIATION WITH



Victoria Sin: The Toronto born drag artist found that London drag didn't try to imitate perfect gender constructs / Daniel Hambury/@stellapicsLtd

By [Ben Luke](#) | 23 July 2018

In the Park Nights series the [Serpentine](#) cuts loose, inviting experimental artists to make new work to perform amid its annual pavilion commission. It also provides a moment where the Serpentine can introduce emerging artists, and on Friday, Victoria Sin, among the most exciting young artists working in London, will create something spectacular.

Evening Standard, 2018

The sky as an image, an image as a net, is “a fragmented narrative”, Sin tells me when we meet in the Serpentine’s Chucs restaurant. The work is typical of Park Nights’ celebration of multi-disciplinary work. “There are about 16 different works in this performance. Five-minute poems, sketches, songs, and they’re all written from different experiences.”

Now 27, Sin was born in Toronto and has lived in London since 2009. They first became interested in drag aged 17, but it was after their move to London that they became a performer. In Toronto, they explain, “there were no people who were assigned female at birth among the people who did drag”.

But London was different. “In London’s drag scene there are fewer drag queens who are trying to pass as women or trying to look real, trying to look seamless,” they explain. “It was a lot about this idea of genderf**k drag: it’s not about looking like a man or a woman, you can be in drag as a binbag or as a monster. And because of that, because it was so much less about drag that was trying to imitate perfect gender constructs, people from all different gender backgrounds were coming in and just doing whatever.”

Sin had initially gained a reputation on the club scene as an illustrator, and the glitter penises they did for the toilets of a favourite club haunt, Vogue Fabrics in Dalston, are a legacy of those early artistic endeavours. But at the club they had met figures such as Holestar, a female drag queen, so while it was still “really daunting”, Sin says, “I felt comfortable enough to admit to myself that I had always wanted to do this thing, and that I could just do it.”

Sin’s drag character draws visual inspiration from certain “icons of femininity”, including Marilyn Monroe, Marlene Dietrich and Jessica Rabbit, the animated character in Disney’s Who Framed Roger Rabbit. “For me it’s about

Evening Standard, 2018

looking at the genealogy of images of femininity, so one will come from the other,” Sin says. “And through the continued performance or representation of these images of femininity, that specific kind of femininity is naturalised, and then the next person who takes it up has to do it even more for it to be spectacular. This is how images of femininity become so outrageous and why it’s normal for celebrities such as Kim Kardashian to have a body that is so sculpted.”



Like other non-male drag queens, Sin has encountered hostility to their drag character and work. “I started getting comments from people, mostly online, who really took offence, I mean really hated me. And even now, sometimes on my Instagram pictures, I have people being like, ‘You’re an idiot, drag is for men, stop doing what you’re doing.’” How does Sin explain this reaction? “On the first level, I’m somebody who is read as a woman who is unapologetically taking up space in a space that has a subtle but very present misogynist undertone and attitude,” they say.

Evening Standard, 2018

Sin notes that sometimes on [RuPaul's](#) TV series *Drag Race* and elsewhere, “the drag that people do is very misogynist... often the butt of the joke is women. But, for me, the butt of the joke is gender.” Amid this context, Sin is clearly pleased to be included in the Hayward Gallery’s show *DRAG*, opening in August, which, they say, is “about expanding representations of who’s doing drag and why they’re doing it and what that looks like”.

Inevitably, given Sin’s subject matter, much of their work is deeply personal, and elements of autobiography punctuate their *Park Nights* performance. “There are some incredibly personal moments in there,” they say, while adding the words of the psychologist Carl Rogers: “What is most personal is most universal.” These autobiographical elements might relate to sexuality and gender but they also touch on family, and the “dynamics of being a mixed- race person and having a Chinese dad and a white mum,” Sin says. Victoria Sin is their real name, despite the fact that, because it’s such an apt name for a drag artist, “everyone thinks it’s fake”.

One way that Sin’s Asian background is alluded to is through excerpts from the African-American writer Samuel R Delany’s [sci-fi](#) classic *Babel-17*, which was, Sin says, “the first book that I ever read that had an Asian female protagonist”, Rydra Wong. Delany’s work is part of the “social science fiction” sub-genre, more anthropological than technological. Sin admits to having been “a science fiction nerd” from childhood, and now links the works of Delany, and other key sci-fi writers such as Ursula Le Guin and Octavia Butler, to the experience of drag.

“These movements that were attached to activism like Afro-futurism and cyber-feminism, are ways of using speculative fiction to imagine what a better world looks like, and how it functions,” Sin says. Through reading them, Sin argues, “you can even have an idea of what it would feel like to live there. So in this way it functions like drag, in that it’s a way of

Evening Standard, 2018

taking yourself out — for science fiction out of your environmental, social context, and for drag, out of your bodily context.”

Sin hopes their work functions like “good science fiction”, so that you come away from “a particularly immersive story with some different perspectives to take away with you and think about while you’re moving through the real world”.

Babel-17 means so much to Sin because not only is Wong Asian but, they explain, she’s “a genius: somebody who was a writer, a poet, known across galaxies for her work”.

Sin may not yet be able to reach other galaxies, but they’re on the brink of becoming a big star in this one.

*Park Nights: Victoria Sin, Friday, Serpentine Galleries, W2;
DRAG: Self-Portraits and Body Politics, Hayward Gallery,
SE1, Aug 22–Oct 14*

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 **Post-Cyber Feminist International** was held at the ICA, London 15 – 19 November 2017. Main image: Victoria Sin performing at Glitch @ Night, part of Post-Cyber Feminist International 2017, ICA, London. Courtesy: ICA, London; photograph: Mark Blower*

Warehouse, 2017

Magnets

by Kate Paul



Victoria Sin, still from Narrative Reflections on Looking (2017)

we would have left the room with warmth. Instead, there is Victoria Sin's Cthulhu Through the Looking Glass (8:25pm). The Wikipedia entry for the fantasy creature that gives this last film its name reads, 'simply looking upon the creature drives the viewer insane'.

How long lasting is the disruption of a screening, of practicing identification and its failure?

Victoria Sin sits in front of us with a bouquet, dressed in white, plastic breasts large, partially exposed, as the narrator describes ripping an image out of a magazine and pasting it onto their face, sucking their finger through a mouth rip, monstrous.

Kate Paul is an artist and autism support worker based in Manchester.

The Guardian, 2017

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

The Guardian, 2017

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.”

The Guardian, 2017

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,

The Guardian, 2017

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?"

Define Gender: Victoria Sin

Spotlighting the boundary-pushing drag performer's transformation

For the first episode in our new series of Define Gender, British-Iraqi director Amrou Al-Kadhi drew on his experience as creative director of drag group Denim, to create a portrait of London-based artist and performer Victoria Sin. Here, he talks about the ideas behind the film:

"Victoria Sin is my hero. While many London drag queens have dismissed politics for social capital, Victoria's drag constantly challenges, provokes, and rejuvenates the city's queer spaces.

"My hope is that viewers will experience the transformative power of Victoria's drag"



"I'm so inspired by how Victoria unapologetically takes up space when they are in drag. They give spotlight and agency to the daily labors of femininity that are invisible and policed. My hope is that viewers will experience the transformative power of Victoria's drag, and will watch this queer unicorn warrior be where they belong—in cinematic grandeur, with a gaze that they own."

June 12, 2017

AnOther, 2017

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

AnOther, 2017

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

AnOther, 2017

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."



AnOther, 2017

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."



AnOther, 2017

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."



AnOther, 2017

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."



AnOther, 2017

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.”

i-D, 2016

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.

i-D, 2016

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.



i-D, 2016

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.

Are racism and misogyny still prevalent throughout queer spaces?

It was a harsh realization but, even though gay bars may accept me for being gay, they could still hold the same racist and misogynist attitudes of the wider world. Having your voice easily dismissed or belittled, being infantilized and not taken seriously – these are all things I've experience as an Asian woman in and out of gay spaces. The racism is obvious in the Grindr bylines we've all heard ('No Fats / No Femmes / No Asians') but it also becomes obvious when you look around most established gay bars. How many queer, trans, or intersex POC do you see? People don't like to come where they don't feel welcome, and violence is often experienced subtly.

i-D, 2016

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.

i-D, 2016

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

Text Jake Hall

Images via [Instagram](#)

The Creator's Project, 2016

London's 'Dream Babes' Reveal the Spirit of Drag




A surreal sci-fi performance called 'Dream Babes' brings all sorts of liberation to Autoitalia South East.

TC

By [The Creators Project](#)

GA

By [Gabriela Acha](#)

September 25, 2016, 2:05pm   



VICTORIA SIN AND EVAN IFEKOYA. DREAM BABES, 2016. PHOTO BY HOLLY FALCONER, IMAGE COURTESY AUTO ITALIA AND THE ARTISTS

New communal platforms are needed in order to deconstruct established roles, create new spaces for gathering, sharing and learning from one another. Therein lies *Dream Babes'* raison d'être; an ongoing collaborative platform developed between visual artist and female drag performer [Victoria Sin](#) and the London-based organization [Auto Italia South East](#).

The Creator's Project, 2016

The London-based Sin aims to deconstruct stereotypes, confuse and challenge the viewer through acts that subvert traditional perceptions of drag queens, where a specific idea of femininity is usually exaggerated and enacted by men. Drag's political potential can however challenge binary ideas, acting as a subversive and liberating platform for diversity, rather than for the repeated re-enactment of the same models.

Sin, who identifies as cisgender, rejects the idea that men and women have to fulfil specific roles according to their genders. With this mission, this second edition of *Dream Babes* triggers a set of encounters through a three-evening- program in various formats such as workshops, performances, screenings and dj sets, reaching varied levels of public engagement.

A video posted by Auto Italia (@autoitalialive) on

Sep 10, 2016 at 11:52am PDT

AutoItalia's space is carefully staged for the occasion, becoming immersive and alienating. Sleek white furniture, fake fur cushions and purple light condition the public's perception of actions taking place within, adding to their theatricality and extravagance. Affection, sexuality, and intimacy are performed and used as material to engage the public through the performative acts of Special Tears and Evan Ifekoya & Victoria Sin.

The Creator's Project, 2016

Through them, texts on personal experiences and intimate feelings are read off phones, framing intellectual insights with pure emotions. The duo Special Tears, composed of Cassandre Greenberg and Christopher Kirubi, present a conversational piece reciting in turns a set of romantic politics made text. Images of themselves as babies, fakely crying photoshopped tears, are projected on the bench where they sit.

Evan Ifekoya + Victoria Sin, dressed in white suits with mirror-like patches, sit and read from their smartphones, describing some joyful depravation in secret clubs and awkward bodily interactions, questioning the possibility of being cyborg and goddess at the same time, rejecting binary choices. They both alternate speech with musical intercourse and some club-like dancing on a podium, until Sin stands up in a proud pose and starts lip-synching Diana Ross in an astonishing play-back performance.



DREAM BABES, 2016. PHOTO BY COREY BARTLE-SANDERSON, IMAGE COURTESY AUTO ITALIA AND THE ARTISTS

The Creator's Project, 2016

Enabled through their inclusion, workshops mainly addressed to queer, trans, intersex, and people of color offer a deeper-level engagement, while crystalizing a community. DJ Virginia Wilson shows the basic entails of djing through an express class, supported by her organization Resis'Dance, whereas in Lipstix and Lipsynx Performative Workshop, Raju Raje and Adam Saad encourage participants to acknowledge their secret selves by performing the freedom of self-defining through alternative survival methods.

Dream Babes interlaces performances, workshops, screening-discussions around science fiction author Samuel R. Delany, and a more laid-back, socially interactive scenario with sets by DJs Manara, Spacer Woman (Chook Ly Tan), and Sidney UltraOmni. It acts as a metaphoric house where to feel safe and to perform the real spirit of drag surrounded by peer forces, and ultimately opens up discussions around the possibilities of performing femininity outside the cliché.

The Creator's Project, 2016



DREAM BABES (2016). IMAGE COURTESY AUTO ITALIA AND THE ARTISTS;
PHOTOGRAPH: HOLLY FALCONER (INTERIOR)

Dream Babes, the second edition of an ongoing project by Victoria Sin and Auto Italia South East, took place September 7 - 9, 2016 at Auto Italia South East, London.

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