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Yee I-Lann's Plucky Approach to Identity Politics

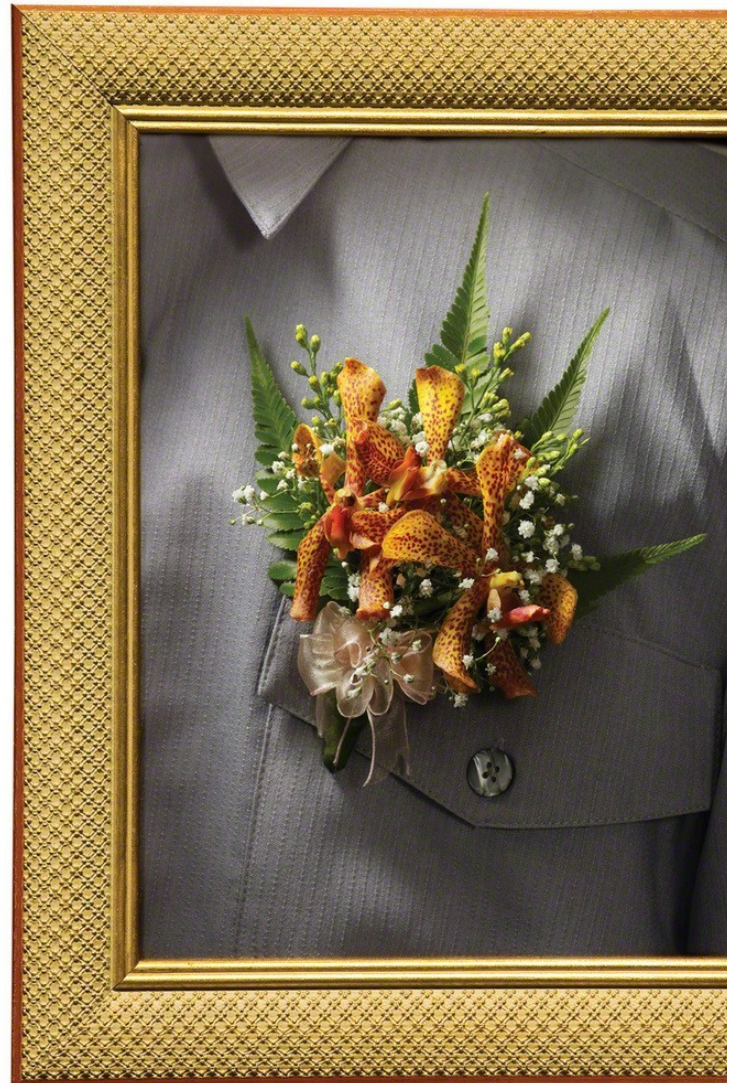
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19 HOURS AGO

Yee I-Lann likes to think of the cross-cultural makeup of her native Malaysia as “a fruit salad,” a metaphor that serves as the jumping off point for a gutsy, elegant exhibition at Singapore’s Silverlens gallery. Like many post-colonial countries, Malaysia is home to a rich spread of nationalities, traditions, and rituals that interact but don’t necessarily intermix. Yee’s photo-media works tease out the historical genesis and contemporary resonance of exuberantly distinct cultures (oranges, bananas, etc., in Yee’s analogy) and the areas that encourage their interaction (the bowl and its residual mixed fruit juice).

In our increasingly globalized world, Yee’s metaphor and the impact of her work extend beyond the borders of post-colonial bailiwicks. With the facility a historian applies to connecting faraway, polarized dots, Yee’s prowess lies in her ability to fuse past and present and local and universal referents. Here, Yee presents three idiosyncratic series that poke at the boundaries of the photographic medium and identity politics.

In the exhibition’s namesake body of work, “Tabled” (2013), Yee superimposes candid images of contemporary city dwellers onto plates that resemble traditional blue and white china, a craft that originated in East Asia in the 14th century and quickly spread across the globe. In their fragile, alabaster surroundings, Yee’s floating subjects become decorative motifs representing a country’s collective memory, rather than individuals going about their daily lives.



Yee I-Lann

The Orang Besar Series: “YB” #2, 2010

Silverlens

\$1,000 - 2,500

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The more overtly political “Picturing Power,” 2013 folds found images of Malaysians and Brits from the early 1900s into stark, surrealistic panoramas that surface past inequalities, continued tensions, and a less than optimistic hope for an integrated future.

Small but mighty photomontages from the “YB Series,” (2010) are a mischievous postscript. Masquerading as a topological study of exotic boutonnières and florid batik shirts, the images double as plucky political commentary. The mesmerizing tropical flowers are worn by nepotistic figureheads at official governmental events to indicate their elevated status and power.

—Alexxa Gotthardt

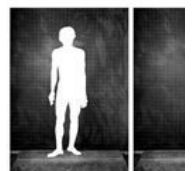
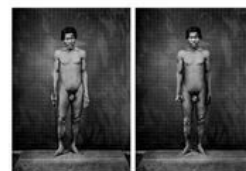
“Tabled by Yee I-Lann” is on view at Silverlens, Gillman Barracks, Singapore, Aug. 1st–Sept. 7th, 2014.

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Yee I-Lann
Tabled (set of 50), 2013
 Silverlens
 \$20,000 - 30,000

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Yee I-Lann
Study of Lamprey's Malayan Male I & II, 2009
 Silverlens
 \$2,500 - 5,000

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