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Close to the Chest



(L-R) Paula Rondon
You Jump, I Jump (detail), 2015
Foam, ceramic, wood
Dimensions Variable

Natalie Tung
Untitled (Six Children), 2015
inkjet on newsprint
10 x 12 inches

Paula Rondon's sculptures meet many of the expectations an art audience has for contemporary sculpture in 2016: unconventional materials arranged in space, a distinctive eye for color. They even reference art history, pointing to an assemblage tradition from Ed Kienholz to Rachel Harrison. And, like Kienholz's landmark installation *Roxys* (1960-61), there seems to be an implied narrative. The sculptures look like characters, and the compositions like tableaux. The titles further the impression, until you "get" it: an "aha" moment.

Rondon draws imagery from films so classic that they have entered the public domain of the collective unconscious: *Dirty Dancing*, *The Graduate*, *Titanic*. Already-seen, already-parodied, the scenes she uses are immediately recognizable. Two buoys become Jack and Rose at the bow of the *Titanic*. But Rose is wearing floaties, doubling down on her already buoyant rubber body, as if Rondon could still change the plotline, presenting Rose as humorously over-prepared. And yet, despite the pathos of her surrogates and the familiarity of her plotlines, Rondon's sculptures are not *quite* figurative. Rose is still a buoy pierced by banisters. The sculptures are freeze-frames, locked in perpetual climax, like actors cueing for the director to call action.

Natalie Tung's images arise from a solitary process. She lies in bed, watching nighttime pass, waiting for duration to give way to stillness, and stillness to give way to sensitivity. In the vein of Andy Warhol's eight-hour, single-shot film of the Empire State Building by night, *Empire* (1964), the sense of nothing happening falls away, and subtler occurrences coalesce. Cars pass by. Headlights trace paths of light through her blinds and across the bedroom wall. Each leaves an imprint on memory: an afterimage. Slowly, the room becomes a kaleidoscope of new and half-remembered visual phenomena. These are the moments Tung photographs.

Curating from among hundreds of these nighttime documents, Tung then prints and scans the most dynamic examples with a handheld scanner. Turning the prints and swapping them for others mid-scan, she casts one more trail of light and conjures an image of that kaleidoscope. Points of time collapse into undifferentiated experience. Like Tony Smith's drive on an unfinished highway, the constancy of the bedroom, like the unmarked pavement, conflates points in time and space. But this is a fragile, un-nameable feeling, stretching language to its limit. You can experience it, remember it, but are never quite sure it's more than in your head, because of course it is.



Rondon withholds all but the most iconic details of a scene. Abstract ideas are not the hidden content of apparently mass cultural imagery. Blockbuster films are the hidden content of apparently abstract sculpture. Her work gathers its force from our image-saturated culture, playing off images we have already seen innumerable times. Tung leaves unsaid what can't be said in the first place. By withholding optical interest, her images become as still as a mirror lake. Our attention is drawn to the slightest ripple, diffuse, half-remembered and already vanishing. Tung suggests that the numbness produced by our endless flood of images could be the ground for heightened sensitivity. Both Paula Rondon and Natalie Tung withhold not to refuse meaning, but to explore the particular meanings made possible by their silence.