

REVIEWS

A Departure from Reality III: The Tender Truth Blindspot Gallery and Blindspot Annex Until Oct 31

Staged and manipulated photography has been around since the 19th century and the current show at Blindspot Gallery features contemporary variations of this tradition by two up-and-coming mainland photographers – Maleonn and Jiang Pengyi.

Jiang uses Photoshop to critique the country's cityscapes. His *Unregistered City Series*, consists of dilapidated interiors with elaborately detailed city spaces as if in miniature. Appearing as if they are models, these city segments are instead careful, digitally manipulated collages that suggest not only an attitude of disposability but also a second, contradictory implication of intimacy and squalid domesticity. The "unregistered" reference in the title seems to unsympathetically refer to the country's *hukou* residency policy, which creates vast spaces of "illegal", unregistered migrants in many of the mainland's eastern cities.

Maleonn's somewhat contrived images span a variety of topics, from Tang dynasty poetry to modern cinema. From the bizarre irreverence of his *Second-hand Tang Poem Series* – black-and-white works alluding to literati ink painting conventions – to the elaborate, imaginative and occasionally

captivating *Book of Taboo* and *Postman* series, the artist seems obsessed with history, tradition and obscure narratives.

While some of his attempts seem overambitious, moments of elegant intensity come through in works such as *Postman, No. 2* and *Book of Taboo, No. 8*. Here, the mise-en-scene seems to open multiple narrative interpretations, at once evocative and playful. In contrast, his *Portrait of Mephisto* (below) series feels like ham-fisted intellectualism, the Faustian references more pretentious than engaging.

In the end, the weak moments from both artists' work are far outweighed by curator Janet Fong's intriguing conflation of works. With Blindspot's new south island space we find both a show worth visiting and a gallery to keep an eye on in the future.

Norman Ford

