

Reviews & Articles

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Angela Su: The Afterlife of Rosy Leavers

by John BATTEN

at 12:27pm on 25th July 2017



Captions:

1. Angela Su, Installation view of *Rorschach Test* drawings at Blindspot Gallery, Hong Kong
2. Angela Su, *Rorschach Test No.1*, ink on drafting films, 151.5x105cm, 2016
3. Angela Su, *A Reminder to Myself*, inkjet print on fabric, set of 8 (one shown), installation size variable, 200x87cm each, 2017

(原文以英文發表，評論〈徐世琪：Rosy Leavers 的前世今生〉個展。)

Hong Kong artist Angela Su's recent exhibition, *The Afterlife of Rosy Leavers*, at Blindspot Gallery was excellent. I rarely give such high praise, but her exhibition was audience-focused with a strong and understandable 'message' for the viewer, well displayed, had a strong ambience, good explanatory information, and, the displayed visual art prompts you to say "yes!"

Su uses a range of media in her show: video, drawing, appropriated photography and installation. She is well known for her pseudo-anatomical/biological drawings on paper with imagery often built-up by using layers of translucent drafting paper. However, it is not her drawings taking centre-stage in the exhibition but the excellent title video, a satirical-styled biography documentary, *The Afterlife of Rosy Leavers*; similar in style to the American film-maker Errol Morris' documentaries. This video lays out the central themes of the exhibition by discussing artist Rosy Leavers and her influences. But, who is Rosy Leavers? She looks exactly like Angela Su. Indeed, the exhibition and this video is a "self-reflexive journey" for Su, who appears in the video as an animated alter-ego/doppelgänger named Rosy Leavers.

Su strongly questions our "perception of reality" and presents a variety of ideas, including her own research on mental illness and social control, as well as exploring some recurring visual motifs used in her work. Throughout the exhibition, Su emphasizes her scepticism of medicine's treatment of mental illness and this is best seen in two installation pieces. *My sincere apologies* features a bed – possibly a counsellor's or patient's bed – covered with an embroidered bed-sheet of poignant text using hair; it is an apology from a 'patient' suffering depression ("a 'troubled' woman", possibly the artist).

A Reminder to Myself is a set of 8 designed protest banners inspired by Su's research of the radical 1970s German patient's reform group, the Socialist Patients' Collective (SPC). In a radical call to the medical establishment, the SPC argued to "turn illness into a weapon" to demand change to medical practices and systems – particularly the treatment of patients in psychiatric institutions. The SPC encouraged radicalism to challenge the state's institutions of social control. Su's banners carry a similar message for the Hong Kong public.

Two of the visual motifs that Su highlights in the exhibition's drawings and videos are examples of 'doubling' and of the spiral. The hypnotic video *Rosy has a spinning twin* begins with autistic children playfully spinning in a room, but quickly morphs into permutations of spiraling and then symmetrical ('doubling') Rorschach patterning. Su's, also symmetrical, *Rorschach Test* series drawings are intricate floral patterns but the viewer will also use their "deeply intuitive side of the human psyche" to recognise patterned sexual organs in the drawing.

This visually exciting and intellectually brave exhibition displayed originality and probity – it cements Angela Su and her art in the forefront of Hong Kong's contemporary art scene.

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