

For Immediate Release

Jen Liu: I Am Cloud | 17 September - 2 November 2024

Venue: Blindspot Gallery (15/F, Po Chai Industrial Building, 28 Wong Chuk Hang Road, Wong Chuk Hang, Hong Kong)
Opening Hours: Tuesday to Saturday, 10:30am – 6:30pm (Sunday and Monday, by appointment only); closed on public holidays

"We are bodies as contraband, women made of cloud. Do you see me now?" – Jen Liu

Blindspot Gallery is pleased to present Jen Liu's debut solo exhibition at the gallery and in Hong Kong entitled "I Am Cloud", on view from 17 September to 2 November 2024. The exhibition will present Liu's recent and new body of work which encompass videos, paintings, and mixed-media animatronic sculptures. "Jen Liu: I Am Cloud" moves from the final chapter of Liu's project *Pink Slime Caesar Shift* (2016-2023), marked by her film *The Land at the Bottom of the Sea* (2023), into a new body of work including the titular video *I Am Cloud* (2024) which will premiere at the exhibition. The gallery will analogously be divided into a dark and light room, signaling the change from ocean to cloud, liquid vaporizing into mist.

In this presentation, Liu draws upon research and non-fictional materials to create fabulated narratives that examine the virtualization of work - its realities, its speculative futures, and its historical precedents. The title evokes the Cloud, a cyber infrastructure which stores our memories and data, seemingly automated but in fact powered by an invisible soft body network of humans.



The exhibition opens with *The Land at the Bottom of the Sea* which was commissioned by the 13th Taipei Biennial, concluding *Pink Slime Caesar Shift* that proposes new tools for communication through biological encryption. *The Land at the Bottom of the Sea* probes what happens if an individual's social traces are removed, how she might be remembered or survive. The film presents an underwater narrative of an office worker falling into the bottom of the sea. She encounters menace in the form of mermaids who gorily devour her. Her dismembered body parts sink in plumes of blood, swallowed into the depths of

the coral reef, disappearing into the abyss. Death will come, not as a biological fact, but as a social fact in a world of women. AI-generated and found texts comprise a script that addresses technology's shortcomings in resolving man-made ecological issues, its tendency to create new problems while failing to solve existing ones. *The Land at the Bottom of the Sea* and *Pink Slime Caesar Shift* were made with the support of Creative Capital Foundation.



Liu's latest film *I Am Cloud* marks the genesis of a new group of work which explores burgeoning forms of labor in the virtual era, and the workers hidden within confined, mechanical façades. The video is structured by three figures: the Amazon MTurk worker, the Xenobot, and the 19th century Chinese migrant sex worker in the US. Each is seemingly non-existent but also absolutely necessary, figures borne from the desire to separate work from human consciousness, and to compress the body into ever-smaller spaces.

The Amazon MTurk is named after the Mechanical Turk, an automaton from the 18th century that enthused audiences throughout Europe for its ability to beat humans at chess - but was actually a box in which a hidden person would move pieces around from underneath the playing board. Amazon similarly deploys their MTurk workers, humans who invisibly perform innumerable data tasks - from digitization and data analysis to AI training. They receive little compensation and no worker protection, incessantly contending for scraps. Mirroring these micro-laborers were the Chinese women smuggled into the US in the 19th century as sex workers, an illicit whisper amidst the roaring waves of incoming Chinese male workers spurred by events such as the California Gold Rush. These women were kept in enclosed spaces, their invisibility enforced by exclusionary laws, raids, and deportation.



The film looks on to the future of the micro-laborer – the Xenobot, a microscopic robot, made from living frog cells, deployed to clean microplastics out of the ocean, perform non-traumatic surgery, and to be used in stealth military applications, among other possibilities. They will be employed at great numbers. Looking to the human eye like a cloud of fine particles, they will be workers without consciousness, biological bodies without desire beyond the mechanics of work.

Accompanying the film are two sculptures in the light room, both white steel cubes. One spits out bubbles, filled with clouds containing pulverized data documents from MTurk – surveys, spreadsheets, and other data entry tasks. As each bubble bursts, a mouthful of cloud is released, and dissolves into the air. The other sculpture is outfitted with blinking animatronic eyes and a voice-responsive audio chip salvaged from a sex doll whose vocal track is strangely amateur (perhaps a worker in the doll factory with spare time on her hands.) The sculpture conjures the image of early brothel rooms: tiny single-woman rooms with barred windows for passersby to view these female merchandises from the streets. This too forms an eerie resemblance to the Mechanical Turk.

Though light-hearted on the surface, the humorous anthropomorphs in Liu's new paintings point to the stark reality of the humans hidden within an automated veneer. Two distinct groups of paintings – one dark and one light – are interspersed between the two videos, and sculpture set. The paintings are made from pulverized e-waste on handmade paper, evoking the machine facade which conceals multiple microworkers. The dark paintings* depict server farm stacks and underwater data pods anthropomorphised with human features, in the form of girlish ponytails, thongs, and vent-shaped butts. Conversely, in the light iridescent paintings, we see clouds which seem to gaze back at us. Office supplies take on a life of their own, resurrected as the infamous Microsoft Office Assistant "Clippy", as they help cartoonish skeletons get through a day's work. Those skeletons hush one another, a secret sisterhood. Stiletto heels, a common metonym for sex play, stand without their wearers – the mysteriously vanished, leaving only puffs of smoke or a pair of ankle socks behind.



About Jen Liu

Jen Liu (b. 1976, New York, USA) works with video, painting, sculpture, biomaterial, and dance performance to speak to issues of diasporic Asian identities, postcolonial economies, speculative feminism, and the remotivating of archival artifacts. Based on her research on existing socioeconomic conditions, Liu creates fabulated narratives which reinterpret contested accounts of the past and present. Liu's solo exhibitions were held at / (Slash) (San Francisco), Cornell Tech (New York), ARIEL Platform for Feminist Art (Copenhagen), LAXART (Los Angeles), SomoS Kunsthaus (Berlin), and the Whitney Museum (New York). Her works have also been exhibited at SculptureCenter (New York), 13th Taipei Biennial, 2023 Future of Today Biennial (Beijing), Power Station of Art (Shanghai), MAK Center for Art + Architecture in collaboration with LACMA (Los Angeles), Smithsonian Museum of American Art (Washington D.C.), ACC (Gwangju), MoMA (New York), Kunsthal Rotterdam, Times Museum (Guangdong), Singapore Biennial, New Museum (New York), and Shanghai Biennial. Liu was recipient of the Hewlett 50 Arts Commission, Creative Capital Grant, LACMA Art + Technology Lab, Guggenheim Fellowship in Film/Video, and the Cornell Tech \Art Award, among others. She was artist-in-resident at Asia Art Archive in America in 2024, where she conducted research for *I Am Cloud*, and at Para Site Hong Kong in 2016. Liu currently lives and works in New York.

About Blindspot Gallery

Set up in 2010, Blindspot Gallery is a contemporary art gallery based in Hong Kong. The gallery features diverse contemporary art practices, by emerging and established artists mainly from Asia but also beyond.

Interviews with the artist are welcomed, for media interviews, please contact Ms. Helena Halim at 2517 6238 or helena@blindspotgallery.com.

Image captions:

Jen Liu, *The Land at the Bottom of the Sea*, 2023, 4K single-channel video, 27'30", Edition of 5 + AP.

Jen Liu, *I Am Cloud*, 2024, 4K single-channel video, 15'00, Edition of 5 + AP.

Jen Liu, *All Dolled Up, Strolling Along the Street, She's So Elegant and Sweet!*, 2024, Acrylic ink, handmade mica-based acrylic paint, acrylic gouache, pulverized e-waste, and gesso on paper, 130 x 84 cm (work size), 137 x 91 x 5 cm (framed size)

Jen Liu, *If a Cloud Forms Around You, You May Feel a Tingling All Over Your Body*, 2024, Acrylic ink, handmade mica-based acrylic paint, acrylic gouache, pulverized e-waste, and gesso on paper, 135 x 87.5 cm (work size), 142 x 94.5 x 5 cm (framed size)

(Images courtesy of artist and Blindspot Gallery.)

*The titles of the dark paintings are derived from *Songs of Gold Mountain* (1987) by Marlon K. Hom. This anthology features 220 poems, selected and translated from Chinese to English, taken from two collections of Chinese rhymes published in San Francisco's Chinatown in 1911 and 1915. These texts provide insight into the early life of diasporic Chinese in the United States.