

Mak 2

*Love Pool*

March 24 – April 21, 2023

Opening Friday, March 24, 6–9PM

Peres Projects is pleased to present *Love Pool*, Mak2's (b. 1989 in Hong Kong, China) first solo exhibition with Peres Projects at the Berlin gallery.

A network of neon-lit swimming pools serves as the backdrop to Mak2's *Love Pool*. In the triptychs that make up the bulk of the exhibition lovers sit and stand, pixelated at the poolside. Some stare off into space, seemingly disillusioned with the environment. An absurd humor underpins these reflections of modern domesticity and romantic love. The rooms and figures appear interchangeable, forming a complex of representations analogous to the digital terrain of dating apps, places that purport to be points of intimacy but often leave their users wanting. Through skylights and windows the Hong Kong skyline peers into the space, a constant reminder of the work's underlying motivation: to find a home for artistic expression in a crowded city.

When Mak2 was offered a large-scale exhibition in 2019, she was living and working in a small room in her parents home, tear gas from the Hong Kong protests leaking in through the window. In this claustrophobic environment, she came up with a solution that makes use of the abundance of space in a life simulation game called *The Sims*. Released at the beginning of the millennium, *The Sims* preempted a basic human desire that would go increasingly unmet. As a global housing crisis took hold over the following decades, the game maintained an alternate reality that offered players decent career prospects and even the possibility of home ownership (for their Sims). It was this desire for space that led to the conception of Mak2's extensive project, *Home Sweet Home*, of which *Love Pool* is a sub-series. The project sees Mak2 infiltrate the world of e-commerce and, via an unorthodox chain of production, carry virtual space into tangible space. Creating and screenshotting scenes in her digitally generated version of Hong Kong on *The Sims*, she then divides the scenes into thirds and sends each third to a different e-commerce artist to be drawn or painted. Once pieced together in the gallery, the sections never quite match up, their slight misalignment attesting the works fractured manufacturing process. The result is a collection of disorientating triptychs that attempt to imitate contemporary life but instead copy a simulated perversion of reality. Further to this, in *Love Pool*, each painted triptych has a smaller pencil drawing version. Ironically containing "RAW" in their titles, these pencil works pose as initial sketches when in fact they are the latest iteration of a simulated scene.

These misleading channels of reproduction express the ideas of philosopher Jean Baudrillard who described contemporary society as a simulation made up of representations so far removed from their original that they no longer refer to anything real. Through her own participation, Mak2 reveals these absurdities within the global marketplace and how easily an image can become alienated from reality through its lines of production. In *Love Pool*, an apparent collage of Hong Kongese interiors reveals itself as a montage of unusable, hyper-real rooms where objects and figures are placed and iterated for their aesthetic or comedic value rather than their function. The numerous pools and arches in *Love Pool* allow Mak2 to place characters in frames within frames, creating an internal segmentation that alludes to the phenomena of a world consumed via screens. We glimpse just the edges of interactions through arched doorways; legs hang lazily over arm rests; blurred out couples embrace in sectioned-off rooms. These partially hidden encounters convey a sense that, if the simulation were allowed to run, one might be privy to the details of these moments. As it stands, intimacy is always obscured, pixelated or held at a distance pointing to a growing propensity towards concealment in even our intimate online relationships. In these rooms, the viewer takes on the role of surveyor, monitoring the Sims behavior and curious to know more.

The exhibition's installation work, SFW, an abbreviation for "Safe For Work," consists of a pool of Rubik's cubes which visually mirror a pixelated Sim body, and deals with online surveillance and privacy. Mak2 pokes fun at the absurdity of concealment in the digital realm where every move we make is unavoidably mapped, gathered and sold. If the data collected as we use dating apps harvest a more honest picture of ourselves than our curated profiles, what do our online images refer to if not us? In *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard expresses the cost of attempting to answer this question: "it is dangerous to unmask images, since they dissimulate the fact that there is nothing behind them." As Mak2 exposes the absurdities of contemporary culture, she seeks truth, not in the meaning behind its images, but instead in the processes that underpin them, their complex production histories, and the contradictions that arise in our search for intimacy in these image-centered spaces.

This is Mak2's debut solo exhibition with Peres Projects. Her solo exhibitions include *House of Fortune*, de Sarthe

Gallery, Hong Kong, *Home Sweet Home*, de Sarthe Gallery, Hong Kong, *The Anything Machine*, de Sarthe Gallery, Beijing, and *Art-It*, Hong Kong Contemporary Art (HOCA) Foundation, Hong Kong. Her work has been part of numerous group exhibitions, including HART Haus, Hong Kong, curated by Kelly Chan, Shanghai Art Mall, Shanghai, Beijing Inside-Out Art Museum, Beijing, X Museum, Beijing, K11 Art Foundation, Hong Kong, in collaboration with MoMA PS1, and Whitechapel Gallery, London. Mak2's work has entered several permanent collections, including Daisuke Miyatsu Collection, Ichikawa, and the X Museum, Beijing. Her solo exhibition *Palace of Love* is currently on view at Tao Art Space, Taipei City.

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