

MAI 36 GALERIE

threads

Maia Ruth Lee, Sara Sadik, Jack Warne, Leon Xu

Vernissage: Thursday, 18 January 2024, 6pm

Exhibition duration: 19 January – 09 March, 2024

Opening hours: Tue-Fri 11 - 6:30pm, Sat 11 - 5pm

threads brings together works by Maia Ruth Lee, Sara Sadik, Jack Warne, and Leon Xu, four artists from disparate backgrounds, cultural points of reference, and processed mediums, spanning physical and digital painting, video, and augmented reality. The exhibition explores the intricate tapestry of meaning woven into the word “threads” – with the dual nature of its pronunciation, echoing both connection and disquiet, an interplay between the “threads” of family, culture, and past, and the potential “threat” to their preservation posed by exported technologies, global brands and mass media. Together they reflect on navigating the double helix of connection and disruption in a post-migrant, culturally fluid, digital society.

Trends, tastes, and pop cultures are increasingly becoming global phenomenas, accelerated by social media algorithms (e.g. Meta’s newest social platform also called “threads”) and monopolistic platforms like Spotify or Amazon, arguably leading to more global cultural uniformity, potentially losing important local nuances along the way. At the same time, the search for the individual identity within the mass and the urge to showcase personality is rising. The exhibition explores ways of cultural transition, preservation of memories, and global interconnectedness while building upon and expanding the meaning of individuality and home.

threads conjures images of connection, weaving together the fabric of our lives with the ties that bind us to our roots. It speaks to the familial threads that link generations, the cultural threads that enrich our identities. In **Maia Ruth Lee**’s work, one encounters tangible representations of these threads in her rope-wrapped baggage bags, often seen accompanying migrant workers and diasporic peoples from regions such as East Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East. Lee reflects on the movement of one’s body between borders, the distinctive form of accompanied baggage, and what it signifies.

In **Sara Sadik**’s video *Ultimate Vatos*, a subtle threatening undercurrent emerges. The video follows the protagonist as a participant in a military program called ‘Ultimate Vatos: Force & Honneur’, which is geared towards physical and mental training to become the perfect fighter. The artist provides an incisive yet empathetic analysis of the social pressures and expectations placed on young adults in a post-migrant society. If, at the beginning of the video, the protagonist admits his desire to make a fresh start, to erase all threads, in the end the true victory for him lies in the recognition of his own identity and not in becoming the “ultimate human being”.

Leon Xu’s hazy painting *Intermission* evokes a feeling of universal nostalgia, a shared memory, a daydream that touches us like a thread of human interconnectedness. He captures the depth of transience –in movement and memory. The scene is soft, melancholic, sentimental – a peaceful moment of being fully present. As a Chinese-born immigrant in the US, Leon describes dealing with a

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deeply embedded “immigrant mentality”, a compulsive mindset of restless working which requires Leon to actively learn to calm down and to process feelings and incidents.

A thread of memories continues in **Jack Warne**’s digital paintings, as he explores scenes from childhood filtered into a dream-like daze. Blurred childhood VHS snapshots come to life like visions of the past that just can’t seem to coalesce into reality. Jack grew up with moments of his life in complete darkness due to a blinding caused by a rare genetic disease of the cornea. His paintings are a digital haze, a glitching fog, smudges and unrecognisable forms, a glimpse into his own past and an exploration of his own identity, largely formed by his personal fate that led to his ability to see beyond the eyesight.

Maia Ruth Lee (b. 1983, Busan, South Korea) is a visual artist whose practice spans photography, video, painting, and sculpture. Lee’s work explores language as a mechanism that can shape and give account to experiences, memories, and emotions. Her work also investigates lives shaped by precarity and a state of un-rootedness—maps, atlases, and banners become a device that calls to mind their life of movement, and often, loss. Using translation as an apparatus, Lee transmutes her works between mediums, connecting themes of borders, community, and language, with embodiments of carriers (Bondage Baggage series 2018-), and self-preservation through process and materials. Lee’s work opens up a passageway, forging new lexicons that give form to lives of transience and their stories, beyond immediate and accepted forms of legibility and comprehension.

The videos, performances, installations and photographs by **Sara Sadik** (*1994, Bordeaux, France) range from manga, video games, docufictions to CGI-animated films. In the course of these works, the artist with Moroccan/Algerian roots explores manifestations of what she calls “Beurcore”—a form of youth culture that emerged among the working classes in the North African diaspora. “Beurcore” defines both a hybrid identity and a collective movement constituted through music, such as rap and hip-hop, language, fashion, specific symbols and social media.

Jack Warne (*1995, Cambridge, UK) lives and works in London. He graduated from BA Graphic and Media Design at University of The Arts London (2017); and MA Visual Communication at the Royal College of Art (2019). His work combines digital paintings, composed soundtracks and augmented reality. Jack lost his sight at the age of four until early adulthood, growing up with half of his world in complete darkness. His malady was caused by a hereditary disease of the cornea, the part of our eye that controls the light that allows us to see. This traumatic experience granted him a particular perspective and started his obsession with physiological glitches and virtual error.

Leon Xu (*1995, Zongshan, China) was raised in San Francisco and lives and works in New York. He received a Bachelors of Fine Art from University of Pennsylvania, and a certificate in Painting from Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. His solo show *Wishful Thinking* was presented at 36.1 Projects in 2022.