

## HERALD ST

Cary Kwok

1<sup>st</sup> September – 25<sup>th</sup> September 2016

First Room  
(Clockwise from entrance)

Pimp My Vice (Sottsass Style)  
2016  
Ink, Acrylic and Palladium Leaf on paper  
22.5 x 15.5 cm / 8.8 x 6.1 in Unframed  
26.8 x 20.5 x 4 cm / 10.5 x 8.1 x 1.6 in Framed

Homosexually Tanged  
2016  
Ink, Pencil and Acrylic on paper  
29.7 x 42 cm / 11.7 x 16.5 in Unframed  
47.9 x 35.5 x 4 cm / 8.8 x 14 x 1.6 in Framed

Homosexually Colonised and Cyberpunked  
2016  
Ink and Acrylic  
51 x 36 cm / 20.1 x 14.2 in Unframed  
56.8 x 41.5 x 4 cm / 22.4 x 16.3 x 1.6 in Framed

Homosexually Art Decoed  
2016  
Ink, Pencil and Acrylic on paper  
32 x 23 cm / 12.5 x 9 in Unframed  
28.8 x 36.4 x 4 cm / 11.3 x 14.3 x 1.6 in Framed

Second Room  
(Clockwise from entrance)

Homosexually Hijacked and Steampunked  
2016  
Ink and acrylic on paper  
42 x 29.7 cm / 16.5 x 11.6 in  
49 x 36.5 cm / 19.2 x 14.3 in framed

Arrival (La Belle Époque)  
2016  
Dalbergia Odorifera Wood, Resin, Brass, Pearlescent  
paint, Wood Wax, Cable, Inline Switch, Lightbulb  
holder, Plug, E14 Lightbulb  
Overall: 159.50 x 50 x 49 cm / 63 x 19.6 x 19.3 in  
Sculpture: 52 x 27 x 26 cm / 20.4 x 10.6 x 10.2 in  
Plinth: 107.5 x 50 x 49 cm / 42.3 x 9.6 x 19.3 in  
Ed. 1/6 +1AP

Well Prepared  
2016  
Ink, Pencil and Acrylic on paper  
21 x 29.7 cm / 8.3 x 11.7 in Unframed  
35.5 x 26.8 x 4 cm / 14 x 10.5 x 1.6 in Framed

Homosexually Baroqued  
2016  
Ink, acrylic and gold leaf on paper  
41cm x 29cm / 16.1 x 11.5 in Unframed  
47.8 x 35.9 x 4 cm / 18.8 x 14.1 x 1.6 in Framed

In the thick of Kowloon's Mong Kok quarter, where shops and apartments rise in crammed stacks, an English sign stands out from the Chinese characters and air conditioning units: "Spanish Hourly Hotel". The name carries vague echoes of Hong Kong's cosmopolitan history, but is also brazenly of the present – pragmatic, upfront, transactional. In its seedy exoticism, the Spanish Hourly Hotel is at once romantic and unromantic. It holds the promise of sultry sex amid the squalor and speed of the city. It is a folly – a land of make believe where you pay by the hour.

The idea of sexual fantasy as a folly, defined through or against buildings, is the theme of a new series of drawings by Cary Kwok. Executed in coloured ink and acrylic (and in one instance, gold leaf), these works translate the hyper-sexed aesthetic of the artist's earlier drawings into the genre of the architectural folly or capriccio. In place of comic-book heroes and other male archetypes depicted in moments of sexual ecstasy, Kwok presents a series of fantastical architectural erections and interior designs. Not that the artist's hardcore eroticism has been sublimated. Within dense amalgams of styles and periods, naked men and rigid members reappear – hardened into adornments and supports.

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Homosexually Colonised and Cyberpunked unfolds a vision of vertical 'urban sprawl'. Hong Kong – or Toyko or Manhattan – appears as a Byzantine heap of apartment blocks, colonial-era arches and balustrades, brutalist high-rises, and beefcake male idols. Crowning the 'overthetopness' of the architectural concoction is an uber-gay aesthetic. Adverts and shop signs brim with camp innuendo. Twin statues at the centre of the structure serve as corbels or supports for a multi-storey bridge. Their proud erections spurt symmetrical fountains, and out of the colliding sprays appears a holographic image of a man, rendered in the fine blue biro of the artist's earlier works. He is wearing a virtual reality headset and ejaculating extravagantly – enjoying his own folly or fantasy.

One orgasm spills into another: it is an apt metaphor for the prodigality of Kwok's structures and designs throughout this series. Ornamental flourishes and historical references mount up in giddy, seemingly unstoppable succession. The same central motif of two male figures, their erect members serving as fountains, occurs in Homosexually Baroqued and Homosexually Art Decoed. In the first work, Kwok imagines Giambologna's Rape of the Sabine Women (1583) as a scene of muscly struggle, closer to mud-wrestling than rape. The action plays out against the fanned-out gilt rays of Bernini's Ecstasy of Saint Teresa (1647-52). Through his overtly homoerotic imagery, Kwok satirises the hyperbolic – or climactic – tenor of much Baroque sculpture. (Bernini's Teresa is often described as being the throes of a less-than-saintly ecstasy). He pricks the art-historical gravity of his sources, causing them to decompress: in this drawing, the sculptural ensemble is a support for a treehouse. It is more likely to have been cast from theme-park fibreglass than carved from stone.

In Homosexually Art Decoed, Kwok moves southwards – and forward in time – to the twentieth-century playground of the Amalfi coast. Here, the oversize muscleman-corbels support an Art Deco pavilion, buoying the structure improbably between two cliffs. Beside the 1930s building, the hulking bodies exude the nudist spirit of Freikörperkultur. Equally, they evoke the purist classical sensibility of fascism, as embodied by the opening sequence of Leni Riefenstahl's masterwork of Nazi propaganda Olympia (1938), in which Aryan paragons of male beauty adopt Grecian athletic poses. In Kwok's scene, the naked figures simultaneously underpin the Art Deco structure and puncture its proverbial elegance, introducing a note of absurdity with their water-jet pricks and colossal scale. Kwok's homosexual idols are capable, in this way, of both complementing and undercutting the surrounding tableaux. The implication of the drawings' titles is that homosexuality is an aesthetic chameleon, able to merge with – and find expression through – different historical genres. In Homosexually Tanged, a monumental burnished warrior takes the place of the beefcake Apollos of the Art Deco scene. He stands guard before a crop of pagodas, supporting a smaller outcrop of buildings on one arm, and spouting water from his penis. Homosexuality, to misquote the title, has been 'Tang Dynastied'.

But from another perspective, homosexuality is its own consistent aesthetic in Kwok's work – indelibly informed by the pumped, priapic men of Tom of Finland, and through them, of early gay erotica. Homosexuality appears in a specifically twentieth-century guise, whatever its superficial cultural clothing. The implication, perhaps, is that nothing – not even sexual identity – stands outside of time. In Homosexually Tanged, this idea finds symbolic expression in the buildings. At the centre of the picture is a concrete and glass edifice, emblematic of the International Style. This was a style that sought to eclipse the concept of style – an attempt to transcend cultural context. The architectural historian Nikolaus Pevsner remarked: "Here was the one and only style which fitted all those aspects which mattered, aspects of economics and sociology, of materials and function. It seems folly to think that anybody should wish to abandon it." In Kwok's drawing, the functional structure is smothered by tradition, in the shape of the Tang Dynasty palace.

As if in riposte to Pevsner, Kwok lays bare the folly of attempting to replace period style with 'timeless' form and functionality. Style, like sexuality, is defined by its historical moment. And yet the adverbial "homosexually" of his works' titles implies a consistent way of seeing – characterised by a confluence of flair and frivolity, of the beautiful and absurd (what might, in short, be termed 'camp'). This confluence finds expression in the contrasting content and execution of each drawing: the extravagance of the imaginary structures is offset by Kwok's meticulous craft. In the tradition of Piranesi and other masters of the capriccio, caprice is held in check by exquisite precision.

Kwok lampoons the notion that sexuality might be externalized and allegorized in buildings, décor, or furniture. But he does not dismiss that notion out of hand. Rather, he poses the unanswerable question of how far artistic styles take their cue from natural forms or corporeal impulses, or how far 'art' precedes and defines 'nature'. In Well Prepared, this questioning assumes lurid and comic proportions. We encounter an interior scene, described by Kwok as "just an Art Nouveau room inspired by penises." The spectacle of ejaculation is transmuted into a profusion of elegant form: raw sensation becomes sensuous and stylised. Two arching phalluses form the lower frame of a window, their billowing ejaculate joining in an irregular carved lip around the glass, and enclosing the vista of a night sky. A sex toy and box of Kleenex tissues stand on two occasional tables, supported by curlicues of ersatz pubic hair, as if the sexualized décor will inspire the room's inhabitants to orgasmic release. There is a serene yet stuffy ambience in the rose-hued room. In its centre, a smaller phallus expresses semen into a globular cloud, which acts as a floating lampshade. Kwok has also realised this motif as a functioning lamp, titled Arrival (La Belle Époque). Like candlewax, the white liquid spills back down and coagulates into a table, bearing up the very phallus which created it. The folly is self-sustaining and yet unsustainable (the stream will surely cease and the table collapse) – like style itself, or sex. It is as quixotic and absurd as a never-ending orgasm – or an hour in the Spanish Hourly Hotel.

Text by James Cahill