

IMPULSE

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Hey! We Can Do It!



Huidi Xiang, leave the sewing to (2024). 3D-printed aluminum alloy, wood, resin, polylactic acid. Dimensions variable. Ed. 3 + 1 AP. Courtesy of the artist and YveYANG Gallery.

In 2021, labor journalist Sarah Jaffe published the book *Work Won't Love You Back*, exposing the “labor of love” narrative as a corporate conceit and capitalistic trap. In recent years, with WGA strikes and the art industry’s increasingly open critique of unpaid overtime work, the discrepancy between transactional labor’s romanticized facade and less-than-enticing reality is made increasingly apparent. On social media, reels and memes parodically present Gen Z’s prioritization of work-life balance as “anti-work.” We find ourselves simultaneously indulging in the humorous dystopianism of late-stage capitalist development and feeling apprehensive about the inevitability of this socio-economic structure.

At YveYANG Gallery, Huidi Xiang’s solo exhibition, *goes around in circles, til very, very dizzy*, nuances the labor’s relationship to pleasure, self-realization, mundaneness, and exploitation. Though devoid of overt institutional critique, the show aestheticizes and brings attention to underrecognized labor, which is frequently rife with gender and class implications. Situated in a former sewing machine factory, the exhibition encompasses a site-specific installation referencing an excerpt from *Disney’s 1950 film Cinderella*, in which the protagonist’s animal friends decided to help remodel her late mother’s dress for her to wear to the ball. The dress was later sabotaged by the stepsisters before the Fairy Godmother’s timely magic turned it into the iconic pale blue ballgown.



Huidi Xiang, *the roster*: mary, suzy, perla, sister #4, sister #5, sister #6, jaq, gus, bert, mert, luke, mouse #12, mouse #13, bird #1, bird #2, bird #3, bird #4, bird #5, bird #6, bird #7 (2024). 20 3D-printed aluminum alloy objects. 2 × 2 × 2 inches each. Ed. 3 + 1 AP. Courtesy of the artist and YveYANG Gallery.

The title of the exhibition references a line in the mouse chorus's *Work Song*, in which Jaq laments Cinderella's mistreatment by her stepsisters. Here, two forms of labor are contrasted: hierarchical, imposed labor as punishment or abuse (Cinderella's making the breakfast, doing the mopping, etc.) versus labor of love and care (what the animal friends are doing for her in solidarity).

To give shape to the latter, which frequently goes unacknowledged in comparison to the Fairy Godmother's bravura, Xiang renders the dress-sewing scene in a jolly and upbeat manner: 3D-printed hands, individually shaped hats, and engravings of scenes from the animation film scatter across the room. In *leave the sewing to*, little red shoes peak through the hovering wood strips. And in the finely textured hanging sculpture, *got no time to dilly-dally*, the needle's otherwise pointed tip is replaced by a small cartoon fist, appearing "cute," so to say.

In the introduction to her book **Our Aesthetic Categories: Cute, Zany, Interesting**, literary critic Sianne Ngai characterizes cuteness as a descriptive index that fittingly assimilates the parameters of *consumption*. Ngai characterizes the cute as "an aesthetic disclosing the surprisingly wide spectrum of feelings . . . that we harbor toward ostensibly subordinate and unthreatening commodities." As a result, not only does cuteness as a visual profile conceal the labor involved in an object's creation (due to its formal simplicity, softness, etc.), but it also solicits affective labor from consumers of this aesthetic—those who feel the conflicting impulse to both protect and violate. As Xiang's visualization of these animal friends' labor procures feelings of tenderness and melancholy—we know that the outcome of this labor, unfortunately, ends up becoming disposable or rather, gets turned into a plot device showcasing the extent of the stepsisters' cruelty—the mice's altruistic labor is activated by the viewer's emotional labor. When the cartoon is transcribed in the context of a gallery exhibition, there also seems to be a playful nod to creative workers who, like the mouse chorus, often engage in a "labor of love" that results in little financial gain.



Installation view of Huidi Xiang: goes around in circles, til very, very dizzy. Courtesy of the artist and YveYANG Gallery.

Transforming the likeness of laborers and the procession of labor itself into art commodities also invites a thorough reconsideration of how we are indoctrinated into cycles of labor via consumable products, media, or materials. Whimsical and nostalgic, Huidi Xiang's installation at YveY-ANG Gallery redirects our gaze to Mary, Suzy, Perla, Jaq, Guz, and other animal friends, eliciting a warm and fuzzy feeling as well as a reconsideration of the diffuse ways in which work manifests.

Huidi Xiang: goes around in circles, til very, very dizzy is on view at YveYANG Gallery until March 1, 2025.