

Coming in
from the cold
since 1949

ArtReview



Pratchaya Phinthong

Huidi Xiang goes around in circles, til very, very dizzy

YveYang Gallery, New York 10 January – 1 March

On entering Yve Yang's rear gallery one encounters a minimalist distribution of mostly silver-coloured sculptures reminiscent of theatrical or cinematic props. A giant needle dominates the centre of the room, held horizontally by two cartoon hands whose 'arms' are the shape of a sewing needle's head (*got no time to dilly-dally*, all works 2024). These, in turn, are hung on a steel wire that bisects the space and 'threads' through each needle's 'eye', while the sharp end of the giant needle takes the form of another cartoon hand, this one pointing an index finger. This hand seems to be conducting the whole installation, an avatar for the artist, Huidi Xiang.

Xiang's solo exhibition *goes around in circles, til very, very dizzy* is described, according to the gallery's press release, as the artist's response to a particular scene in the 1950 Walt Disney animation *Cinderella*, in which birds and mice assist the protagonist in sewing her gown. That scene is evoked – sans animals – by the show's ensemble of works, which, along with the hanging needles, includes a wall of flattened depictions of giant silver bows, a

line of wooden 'stitches' held up by tiny red cartoon booties, a series of wood engravings (depicting moments from the film) lined with red stitching and a row of diminutive mouse-size hats. The entire room is circumscribed by this 'threading through' and its invocation of the handmade and the handstitched.

It's not the first time Xiang's riffed on the imagery of the Disney universe: in 2024 she created a sculptural translation of the manically multiplied, anthropomorphised broom from *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* segment of Disney's *Fantasia* (1940). Such proximity to the Disney canon raises questions of influence, appropriation and Disney's popularisation of Western fairytales and mythology. Reportedly, Xiang learned English by watching bootleg DVDs of Disney movies as a child in Chengdu, so the way she metabolises Western pop culture into her own distinct aesthetic language can be read as an act of translation. The artist's 'translations', or intentional misreadings, transform traditional notions of women's labour into more disembodied and surreal propositions. The intentional misreading Xiang performs at Yve Yang, of

the Disney tale of literally materialising a fantasy projection (*Cinderella's* magically manifested gown), inverts Disney's own appropriation of traditional fairytale enchantment from earlier source texts.

Xiang's sculptures themselves evoke artistic precedents, from Lily van der Stokker's wall drawings, to the 'scatter' installation aesthetic of artists such as Barry Le Va and Cady Noland, to the ever-busy 'little people' of Tom Otterness. I'd be tempted to call her attitude towards the anxiety of influence 'brat' if that term wasn't already exhausted. By insouciantly deconstructing arcane mythical archetypes through a radically transparent appropriation of *Cinderella* enmeshed with art-historical tropes, Xiang problematises the spectator's passive perpetuation of both. Her simultaneously whimsical and seriously considered installation mines from the movie a whole array of complex societal issues including gender, class and formal expectation, creating a critical dialogue between inherited aesthetic ideologies and their potentially subversive translations.

Tom McGlynn



got no time to dilly-dally, 2024.
3d-printed aluminium alloy, polyvinylchloride, carbon fiber PET-G, dimensions variable.
Courtesy the artist and Yve Yang Gallery, New York