

Adventures of little

THINGS

A STUDY IN OBJECTS

By Bridget Tracy Tan

“For me an object is something living. This cigarette
Or this box of matches contains a secret life much more intense
Than that of certain human beings.”

In 1936, German critical historian Walter Benjamin wrote influential essay, *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* – for the purists, it should read ‘the work of art in the age of its mechanical responsibility’; however, it is today known around the world as ‘the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction’. “In principle”, Benjamin said, “a work of art has always been reproducible”. However, “even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be”. Our contemporary contexts of artistic production often neglect this unique quality. What Benjamin referred to as the ‘aura’ of an object, presents its distinctive identity and aesthetic journey if you will.

The 6 artists chosen to be covered in this essay and exhibition, include painters and object makers, they practice in a variety of media that is crucial to underlining the aesthetic journey we hope to rely on in every work of art. Anthony Poon is a painter; Parvathi Nayar is a painter and draughtswoman; Derky Stronach and Jacqueline Ng are ceramists; Terry Poh a sculptor and draughtsman; Claire Cheng a young installation artist. The adventures in little things record the nation of size more than scale. Objects have hitherto this secret life that Miro refers to which begets a sense of intimacy and privacy that wears well in the petite, the small, the little. Size is also a matter of function; not so much a question of delicateness as something one would cherish and observe in secure environs. A little thing becomes like a piece of jewellery or a curio or souvenir that is invested with an idea and a memory. It is a memory that derives itself from the visual quality of the object itself, its presence, as Benjamin offers, in time and space.

Art makers are creators. While they necessarily invent nothing new as much, artistic birth offers reincarnation of the beauty in form and narrative, of things and ideas, ideals. The concept of studying object hopes to deny the loss of aesthetic experience in the contemporary age of multiples and new media. The art makers in this project are directly involved in their creations- there is a sensuousness in the objects they create that can only be offered when an artist has touched and shaped his/her work to that perimeter of what is considered finished.....

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.... Parvathi's small work seen in a series a spatial dimension as well. She determines that we are physically embraced in the nation of her experience(s). We stand, if in the space, somewhat like stranger at a cocktail party, interacting and somehow withdrawing simultaneously, from the unfamiliarity of a board and unknown context. It s a tension that cultivates our sensitivities more than estranger us. The installation of such fine work illustrate the attraction we have to the beauty of objects in a space, but also how they continually resist how we are compelled to de construct them and own them. Each of Parvathi's pieces is part of a greater vision, but they also live in their own space. They have an authenticity that is not reproducible, as authenticity that cannot be repetitive, imperatively offering newness with each invested experience.

The cult of the contemporary obscure our sensitivity to what is an authentic and aesthetic intervention; the purpose of the adventures is to understand that objects present their own life independent to socio-cultural discourse, belonging to the artist and his/her material alone. Frankfurt school stalwart Adorno, writing in 1944, offers, "the great artists were never those who embodied a wholly flawless and perfect style, but those who used style as a way of hardening themselves against a chaotic expression of suffering, as a negative truth. The style of their works gave what was expressed that force without which life flows away unheard."

While a spirited appreciation of art cannot be discovered somewhat from the maker (which is why this exhibition tires to focus on living artists practicing today). It continually offers a transcending of underling truths to both sentiment and materials. The objects live like that artists. And in some cases, will outlive that artist. To invoke the old adage, if we are what we eat, we are also what we make. Art that struggles with the parallel epoch of the technological age offers us hope we are still, and hopefully will continue to be, mysteries unto ourselves. Like all adventures of the great and romantic age, we embark on these journey inevitably to find out more about who we are.