

BIZARRE LOVE TRIANGLE

David Bussel on Ghislaine Leung at Chisenhale Gallery, London



"Ghislaine Leung: CONSTITUTION," Chisenhale Gallery, London, 2019, installation view

In lieu of a critique of institutions, Ghislaine Leung orientates her work and practice toward a critique of "constitutions." That is to say, she investigates "the work" behind the work: its social conditions understood as an immanent set of relations – the "where, when, and how" undergirding the material production and circulation of things and their potentiality as sites of "structural renovation." But what defines these "constitutions" as such, and who ultimately constructs them? In other words, what, therefore, is a constituency, and can it be used to mobilize a different material production of art and life, an "institution of critique"?

Entitled "CONSTITUTION" (all works 2019), Leung's recent exhibition at Chisenhale Gallery

in London seemingly appears as an array of ready-made components the artist has assembled and displayed, but the show in fact is an ecology of commingling structures, ones that collapse methodology with materials, where the structures themselves – spatial, institutional, discursive – generate the work. The objects employed, many of which may not be "the work" itself, are ordinary stuff one could easily purchase online or in a DIY shop, arrayed here in military procession, augmenting their perversity and instability as an ensemble. Before even entering the exhibition, one is confronted by a transformation of the matte-white interior double door to Chisenhale's central gallery space, replaced by a single swing



Ghislaine Leung, "Loads," 2019

door, its surrounds amended accordingly, all in standardized materials, dimensions, and color. Entitled *Closer*, the work exists in name only, part of a constellation of spatial interventions within the show whose exhibited parts are not, strictly speaking, the work either. *Closer* and its corresponding doorway are echoed inside the space in *Flags*: a work comprised of the two interior doors of the gallery, including the reverse side of the internal entrance door (read: exit), all painted in black gloss. Here, again, paint and doors are not to be understood as "the work," for Leung has conceived of her interventions as relational parts: to the gallery, to the viewer, to the other objects; they are additive, distinguished, or enhanced

through context, as both institutional frames and ornaments. *Toons*, for example, employs a similar procedure, where the gallery walls are painted glossy white instead of the standard matte – an institutionalized "whiteness" – that creates a *mise-en-scène* of hyperbolized, material extremes and coded contradictions.

Three iterations of industrially produced, white powder-coated metal wall panels appear in the exhibition, arranged family-like as if in conversation, each one situated parallel and in close proximity to the walls of the oblong exhibition space. *Parents*, facing the entrance, is comprised of two panels, each with a single glazed window. Hidden on the back of one unit is a video monitor playing "Stuff-A-Loons," a balloon-within-a-balloon hobby craft tutorial as seen on YouTube. A group of three panels opposite (and closest to the exit), *Lovers*, has a security lantern on two of its units along with one light and one motion sensor, respectively, both of which supply the others' power through the gallery's own electricity, much as the other panel works. On an adjacent wall is *Loads*, a mounted iPad containing hundreds of color images of everyday objects for exhibition research and beyond, from locks and tools to health and safety signs and soft toys, which can be scrolled through at will. *Children* marks the final panel piece in the show, a single unit configured with a mounted heater (also white powder-coated) and connected to a generator on the gallery floor, itself cabled to the gallery's main power sources and fitted with a nightlight. The generator needs an 18-hour charge to illuminate the nightlight and run the heater for three hours.

On the wall opposite is *Kiss Magic Heart*, two black oblong speakers installed lengthwise and

parallel, where, according to the exhibition brochure, “the structure of the sound is based on one twenty-minute broadcast clock from three UK radio stations Kiss, Magic, and Heart FM [and] consists of sinusoidal waves generated from this structure and full-spectrum pink noise.” The piece employs noise cancellation technology similar to that found in headphones, but opens up its closed system to one that produces incidental abstract sound, dependent upon a viewer’s physical presence and proximity to it in concert with the ambient conditions of the gallery itself. This form of anti- or negative sound composition stands in stark contrast to the properties of hi-fidelity as a model of sonic realism or verisimilitude, producing a sort of aural diagram for dissident production and fugitive hearing.

Located about halfway across the gallery space, bisecting it horizontally and set just off-center, is a row of 20 identical gift-like objects, each containing two white oversized ceramic mugs, wrapped in clear cellophane adorned with red hearts and tied with red and pink ribbons and red pull bows with “The Boss” inscribed on them in black glaze. *Bosses* only exists as a work when all 20 *Bosses II*, each individual gift-like object, are assembled together in tandem. With their central location, repetition of materials, and bright colors, these works form the centerpiece of the show, focusing the viewer’s attention on the asymmetrical roles of artist and institution, or worker and employer. They isolated the “passionate servitude” that a “producer” must inhabit to succeed in life, an individuated subject who not only knows who’s boss (“dependency”) but must “enjoy” their servitude by voluntarily internalizing, in themselves, the same structures of exploitation and alienation the boss demands.

If the latter works point toward the total incorporation of labor and class relations of modern subjectivity and the fantasy of autonomy that upholds it, then the other works in the exhibition reimagine those relations by staging a kind of breach in the circulation of things, a new terrain of struggles into the constituted systems and structures of power that reproduce those very relations. Is not the exhibition, then, finally about marshalling desire and affect toward a different kind of “striving” beyond the imposition of the wage relation and the expectation of consumption, an overcoming of the domination of capitalist forms of life?

“Ghislaine Leung: CONSTITUTION,” Chisenhale Gallery, London, January 25–March 24, 2019.