

Ghislaine Leung: CONSTITUTION

Chisenhale Gallery London

25 January to 24 March

Ghislaine Leung's exhibition at Chisenhale, 'CONSTITUTION' is a charged space: charged with the cold, chemical odour of freshly glossed walls and doors; charged quite literally by cables that run in and around a series of freestanding walls, activating security lights, a hidden monitor and an iPad on the wall; and charged by the heady, shifting waves of sound emanating from two speakers sitting side by side on the wall. Much of this permeating energy is not, however, immediately apparent. On entering, we are presented more with a space of absence than of presence. Each of the white, prefabricated walls – works titled *Parents*, *Children and Lovers* – creates a kind of false enclosure within the gallery, the rudiments of a domestic space broken apart and expanded, with no parents, children or lovers to be seen. We have the feeling of walking into a remote stage set, of needing to deduce how these various fragments are part of a whole, what connects to what – how is this space constituted?

These are questions that Leung herself poses when discussing the title of this exhibition: 'What is a constituency? Who am I as a constituent? What are the constituent parts within an institution? How do we understand how we are constituted by each other and ourselves?' These questions resonate through our experience of the installation, in particular the sonic reverberations that continuously rise and fall as your body moves through the space. The sound piece, *Kiss Magic Heart*, which refers to the three London radio stations from which Leung has extracted and manipulated

content, uses active-noise-cancellation technology as a method of reprocessing and reconfiguring sound spatially. Active cancellation, as used in noise-cancelling headphones, works by creating an enclosed space of resistance; noise is counteracted by playing back its opposite soundwaves. Here, Leung experiments with the possibilities of active cancellation once this sealed relationship – ears, headphones, environment – is broken apart. In a similar way to how she fragments each architectural facet in the physical installation, so this immaterial sound is allowed to pulsate and wrap around it. What is ostensibly an incredibly structured and ordered space is in fact one where contingency is maximised. As we move through it, we become part of a whole, and the thickness of wavering sound vibrating through you heightens this effect.

As a counterpoint to the meandering movements of sound through the gallery, a linear procession bisects the space: 20 pairs of oversized 'The Boss' mugs are elaborately gift-wrapped and sit together like a line of sentinels. Leung appears to be playing with the aesthetics of the workplace, the novelty mug, while rendering the singularity of The Boss redundant through the humorous fact of there being 40 of them. The farcical sense of individuality and power that the mugs symbolise is not only an empty sentiment, but it also speaks to the questions that Leung poses: who is it that shapes and controls this space? Who is The Boss? The fact that the prefabricated walls and security lanterns could easily fit a corporate or domestic setting also highlights a slippage between these two types of spaces, and how transactional acts frequently occur in both.

The Boss reappears within the exhibition as part of a slideshow of images accessed via an iPad on the wall. Titled *Loads*, this slideshow comprises 272 images taken by Leung during the making of this commission; an attempt to lay bare the show's processes and constituent parts by creating an image-based network of reference for the installation in which we are standing. This desire to make evident the make-up of the space is furthered by the gloss-painted white walls and black doors, as well as the gallery's entrance door, which has been shrunk to the standard domestic size. Foregrounding both the space and Leung's process in this way not only highlights the constructed nature of our environments, but also connects to a sense of ornamenting or embellishing.



Ghislaine Leung
installation view

Tiny pink heart stickers are dotted throughout, as is a kitsch house-shaped nightlight; together these playfully incongruous personalisations undermine the mass-manufactured repertoire of the installation.

These architectural, spatial and sculptural adornments create an idiosyncratic rhythm that feels simultaneously familiar, strange and, at times, funny. A monitor hidden behind one of the walls plays a video of a woman demonstrating how to inflate and stuff a balloon, containing objects within an enclosure, held within a delicate, inflated tension. The stuff-a-loon tutorial could be an apt signifier for how this entire space is choreographed, how it is charged with meaning, how it is constituted. ■

Joseph Constable is a writer and curator based in London.