

Garageland Reviews



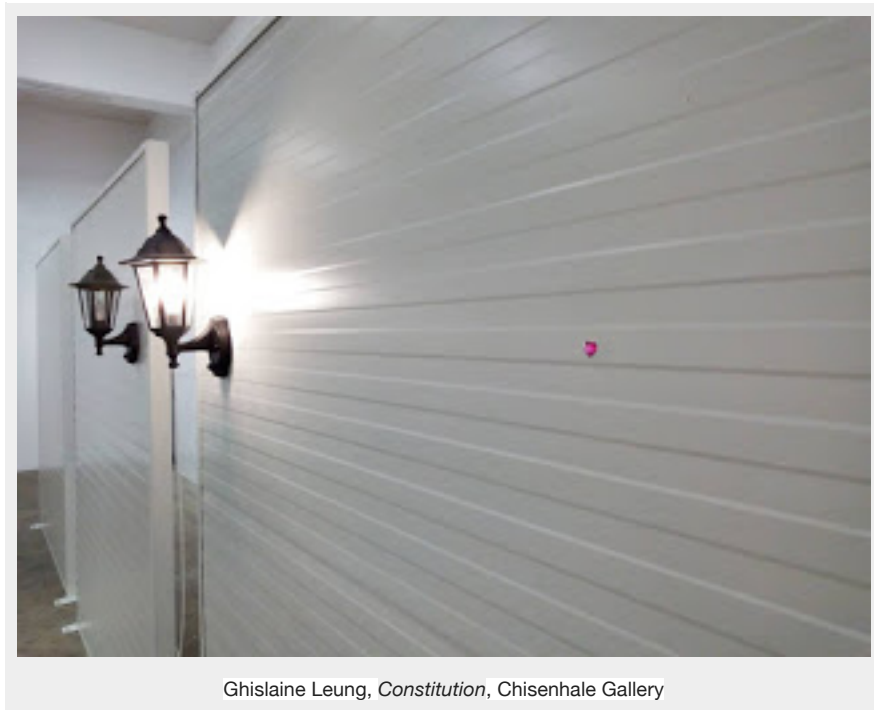
Sunday, 17 February 2019

Refracted Through a Pool of Pink Noise

Toby Upson visits Ghislaine Leung's solo show *Constitution* at the Chisenhale Gallery in East London.

'Everything in the exhibition [is] contingent, to foreground its relations and its reliances' Ghislaine Leung, 2019

Taking her cue from semiotics, Ghislaine Leung approaches art production in the same way an author or film maker might: weaving together a rich set of signs to make tactile the relational structures that underpin our collective social body.



Ghislaine Leung, *Constitution*, Chisenhale Gallery

Walking in to *Constitution* I am greeted by the succulent smell of gloss paint and the soft sound of sun-kissed waves. Just like a conch shell pressed to the ear, the static echo of *Kiss Magic Heart* captivates and entertains in equal measure. Consisting of a 'double mono channel audio file' and two speakers exuding pink noise – a specific type of active noise cancelling technology, *Kiss Magic Heart*'s sonic structure is based on the broadcasts from three popular music radio stations (Kiss, Magic and Heart). Not recognisable sounds, nor 'music', but a tranquil hum, the evocative track conjures memories of the aughts of an idealistic childhood, a Blue Peter 'one I made earlier' moment. This pink noise technology is normally used in headphones, to improve the listening experience by reducing interferences from the outside world. *Kiss Magic Heart* flips this closed technology making the closed open. By flooding Chisenhale's space with pink noise, Leung amplifies not only the architecture and the other works in the show, but also our role as the listener. As we manoeuvre through the space *Kiss Magic Heart*'s sonicstructure alters, bending around the other works, and around our fellow listeners to make obvious the legislative structures which control our relationships to external interference.

An efficient output created through a complex, techno-sociological / conceptual, layering of construction (and conception) processes is a common thread running through the exhibition. More than just mere evocative layering however, the melancholic atmosphere produces a holding experience - akin to the childhood sensation of being

mesmerised by a TV show - echoing the hidden processes, social systems and structures that compose the domestic conditions we are contained by.

Scoping the gallery three sets of metal panels contain *Constitution's* narrative; much like an aughts sitcom each set can be read individually, or as part of *Constitution's* whole, a work in its own right. *Parents*, *Children* and *Lovers* all consist of clean white corrugated panelling framed and locked in place with powder-coated metal brackets and industrial bolts. A single power socket – made safe with rubber stoppers - provides each with its own charge. Much like workers in a factory or modern office block, each panel is simultaneously the same - locked into the concrete structure of the gallery, drawing power from the overarching electricity supply - and an individual, with the possibility of using this charge to their own ends. This paradoxical co-dependency is another theme running throughout the exhibition.

As artworks we see this individuality in action: the unifying panels that form the base of *Parents* are adorned with a set of perfectly glazed windows and a single monitor screen playing a looped stuff-a-loons video tutorial. Viewing this work, I am hit by a fussy nostalgia for childhood balloon filled excitement. Locked to the wall at knee height, to see the video one has to back up against the gallery's newly glossed white walls (*Toons*). To experience the work, one has to participate in a somewhat uncomfortable performance. Like an instructional based artwork (without readable instructions), at its heart *Parents* is an ironic play, a sardonic experience, where didactic directions take the form of kitsch film fun.



Ghislaine Leung, *Constitution*, Chisenhale Gallery

Children and *Family* feature similar occulted layers of media, affect, and critical irony. *Children's* narrative is provided by a portable battery, a nightlight, heater and stickers. In a disheartening move - one akin to my experience with most technology - Leung's battery has only three hours of power and takes over 18 hours to charge. By stipulating that the work only physically exists when the heater and nightlight are on Leung adds a layer of irony to the work. *Family* is perhaps the most technical set of panels, in terms of media performativity. A suburban house light has been added to each panel, one, fitted with a security sensor, flickers to life when it senses movement in its vicinity. Described as 'winking', this light soon switches off when it is rejected. Similarly, the second light, fitted with a heat sensor, switches on when the gallery's space is 16°C - the ideal temperature for working conditions. Again, as a sardonic gesture Leung makes clear that *Family* is only a work when both lights are switched on. These stipulations and the paradoxical use of

media, highlight a co-dependency on the other and indeed, a more concrete dependency on the system to provide us a with legislative body and social meaning.

Our relationship to, and co-dependency on, others and our constitutional system are explored further in *Bosses*. A caricatured vein bringing life to *Constitution's* limbs, *Bosses* consists of 20 flamboyantly wrapped gifts - a pair of oversized 'The Boss' mugs (*Bosses II*), engulfed in transparent cellophane and adorned with extravagant red ribbons. Arranged in a systematic row the gifts are overlooked by the three sets of panels, as if they are anticipating a dramatic breach of the cellophaned skin. As a work composed of smaller editions, *Bosses* is only alive when all 20 limbs are collected together and reconstituted. In stipulating this, Leung immediately questions ideas of distribution and ownership. More than this however, by antagonising the gallerist, curator and collector, Leung uses the artworld system (one full of occulted layers) to question ideas of identity-dependency and individual value.

Leung's interest in constitutional structures and the systems we live through extend from the workplace to the home. Often blurred and transactional, Leung's practice gives the conditions and dependencies which structure our attachments a cartoonish character: everyday dramas are foregrounded through refinement and emotive theatricality.

As with all sitcoms, the credits come at the end of the show. Photographed by Leung over the development of this commission *Loads*, a touchscreen tablet consisting of 272 photos, provides an overview to the everyday tat which has shaped *Constitution's* complex storyline, the work which Leung describes as 'the exhibition consisting of the following works: *Bosses*, *Children*, *Closer*, *Flags*, *Kiss Magic Heart*, *Loads*, *Lovers*, *Parents* and *Toons*.' In this final flourish Leung uses these credits (a somewhat creative reference to her past in structuralist film) to question the unstable position and open/closed relationships in flux, which underpin contemporary western society.



Ghislaine Leung, *Constitution*, Chisenhale Gallery

In 2019 we seem to be in a state of constant negotiation, without a concrete constitution – much like the UK its self. We are looking for a descriptive route to follow. Instead of legislative assurances however, we are comforted by the safety of a tranquil fiction, we sit back and laugh at the quasi-Netflix sitcom, but only to realise we are actually looking in an oversized kitsch mirror.

Toby Upson

Ghislaine Leung
Constitution
Chisenhale Gallery
25 January – 24 March 2019