

incollect

Jinyoung Yu, "LIFE II"

by Benjamin Genocchio
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Installation view of Jinyoung Yu | the LIFE II. Image courtesy of Shoshana Wayne Gallery in Los Angeles.

Jinyoung Yu is that rare breed of artist, someone who makes exquisitely crafted, collectible artwork that nonetheless has a profound conceptual dimension. This is the young Korean artist's first solo show in the United States, presented at Shoshana Wayne Gallery in Los Angeles in collaboration with Choi & Choi Gallery in Seoul, South Korea and Cologne, Germany. It is a smashing success.

Sculpture is her medium and transparent PVC her core material. But her obsessive subject matter is the human mind, particularly tension between our sense of inner self and outer presentation to the world. Her multiple identities, for that is what these sculptures are, physical representations of ideas of self, or three-dimensional characters, are molded from PVC with painted plaster elements.

Standing, figurative representations of anxious young Asian women, as apparent self-portraits, in some cases have more than one face, identity, or personality which adds further complexity to the sculptures. They essentially reflect the different 'faces' that all of us construct for ourselves and present to the world. Shadowing the figures, perhaps for 'emotional support', are cute little lap dogs and cats made of similar materials.



Installation view of Jinyoung Yu | the LIFE II. Image courtesy of Shoshana Wayne Gallery in Los Angeles.



Left: Jinyoung Yu, the LIFE #11 (2020), right: the LIFE #10 (2020), Poly vinyl chloride and fibre-reinforced plastic. Images courtesy of Shoshana Wayne Gallery in Los Angeles.

“the LIFE #11” (2020) is a particularly complicated and engaging sculpture, incorporating the faces as well as distended bodies of four different female figures along with a cat. The figures are women at different ages in the life cycle, beginning with a crouching baby who evolves into a child, then becomes a teenager, and finally a fully grown adult. Each figure rests on another suggesting the iterative nature of identity, and how we build on experiences.

The forms themselves are hollow and transparent, the facial expressions blank and almost impassive, suggesting that there is nothing inside of us — that our identities are nothing more than masks, surface constructs, and that there is zero beyond this as to who we are. This message is unsettling, in contrast to the genuine, gentle beauty of her wistful, introverted figures—their vulnerable fragility is alluring and beguiling.



Left: the LIFE #9, (2020), and right: the LIFE #16, 2022, Poly vinyl chloride and fibre-reinforced plastic. Images courtesy of Shoshana Wayne Gallery in Los Angeles.

Not too many sculptors can manage this kind of psychological tension, holding together a duality in their artwork. Kiki Smith is one who comes to mind, and Louise Bourgeois as well. Both artists focused on the mind-body duality, with a direct feminist bent. Gender politics definitely plays a part in Jinyoung’s art but it feels somewhat incidental or sublimated within a wider exploration of the human condition.

Jinyoung was born in Seoul, where she lives and works. She received an MFA and BFA in sculpture from Sungshin Women’s University, Seoul, and her commitment to sculpture as a craft is obvious—her work is exquisite – detail-obsessed is another way of putting it. Her artworks are magnificent works of technical virtuosity, combining painting and drawing with various forms of three-dimensional casting and making. This is what makes her works so highly prized among collectors. It is hard to make figurative sculpture fresh, exciting, and new.

The present show is installed in a large open room at the gallery with the figures and pets arranged in a group at the center of the space. Together they resemble a crowd of still onlookers quietly contemplating something far off in the distance. They are together but isolated and apart, each in their own world and also detached from each other in spite of their proximity. For Jinyoung the world is a place of loneliness and solitude, even when in a crowd.