

What's on Los Angeles

Pick of the Week

by Jody Zellen
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Jinyoung Yu
the LIFE II
Shoshana Wayne Gallery
August 6 - September 10, 2022



Jinyoung Yu

Jinyoung Yu's poly vinyl chloride (PVC) and fibre-reinforced plastic works are fascinating and unsettling sculptures that explore the disparity between the inner and outer self. Numerous female forms stoically stand within the vast gallery with transparent bodies and painted faces. Some of the figures have multiple heads, more than two eyes and different hair colors and styles. Kitschy depictions of pets — cats and dogs— stand by these figures, more friend than foe. These animals are small and opaque rather than transparent. Upon entry, one encounters *I am okay* (2022), a freestanding, almost life-size depiction of an armless young girl (presumably the artist, suggesting all the works are quasi-self-portraits) made from transparent plastic akin to a blow-up doll. On the ground by her feet is a little dog. Both the dog and the girl are wearing the same flower patterned boots. The girl's feet point inwards — pigeon toed. Though armless, her body cavity contains a flesh-colored hand that holds a yellow flower. The shape of the flower is repeated on her lips as well as on her forehead, where it appears to be a bruise. She stares ahead as if fighting back tears.

While *I am okay* is a solitary figure, in the *Life #10* (2020), Yu combines five females huddled together, their bodies contorted in impossible ways as if participating in a collective armless hug. The sculpture has the feel of a three-dimensional drawing as the PVC shapes are surrounded by a deep brown line that differentiates the figures. The head and arm of a stylized cat emerges from the cluster of bodies, clinging to them with one paw in a manner that parallels the way they cling to each other. While Yu's bodies are empty, her mask-like heads are more realistically rendered supporting flowing waves of black or brown hair. The faces are a light skin tone, the eyes wide and far apart, the lips are shades of pink and red referencing a range of Asian facial features. Are these the same women at different ages, friends or sisters? The subtle curves of each body suggest both love and interdependency.

The head of the lone girl depicted in the *Life #13* (2021) is a collage. Yu juxtaposes three distinct faces with different colored lips, eyes and eyebrows, sharing a bob-styled black head of hair to suggest a kind of simultaneity. The girl's neck is wrapped in a painted red scarf that matches her red slippers. Her legs are painted black tights while the rest of her body is transparent. As she grows from girl to woman, her body fills out and her expression morphs from innocence

to wariness and concern. A small dog with a red collar stands to her right looking away. In this sculpture, as in many of the others, one figure is nested inside another, almost like she is encased in a second skin.

Both the Life #11 (2020) and the Life #12 (2020-21) are also images of transformation. In these sculptures, Yu depicts the emotional journey from young girl to woman, subtly changing the facial features and hair styles to reflect this evolution. In the Life #12, there are four distinct body forms. At the base of the work, a child is hunched over in a fetal position. She is surrounded by a larger version of herself. Perched on her back is a woman who sits straight and tall wearing a flower pattern dress. She is intersected by another older woman in a blue dress who is positioned at an angle across her lap. What looks to be the same cat -- cast from the same mold-- is present in both the Life #11 and the Life #12, suggesting the need for the emotional support of pets as one grows from child to young adult.

Yu's figures are void of environments. They exist as self contained entities that represent her experiences as a Korean woman. While it is impossible to be in her head or know the trajectory of her upbringing, these isolated and lonely women conform to, as well as question societal norms. Yu gracefully depicts this interconnectedness of these versions of the self and expresses the desire to fill empty bodies with shapes and colors. The installation becomes a collection of moments. Each sculpture metaphorically illustrates a woman's journey from childhood to adulthood. In Yu's world view, this is not an easy transformation.