

Chris Kline & Yam Lau, Weave, Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Kingston

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Chris Kline

← *La Manche*, installation detail, Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Kingston, 2018.

Photo : Paul Litherland

Yam Lau

1 *Nüshu: Echo Chambers*, installation view, Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Kingston, 2018.

Photo : Paul Litherland

Chris Kline & Yam Lau

Weave

Installed in the two main galleries, Yam Lau's two video-animations, *Nüshu: Echo Chambers*, are contained within freestanding translucent screened pavilions, while Chris Kline's *La Manche* paintings occupy the surrounding walls. As one moves through the spaces, the artists' works intermittently interrupt and frame the continuity of their respective narrative structures. The spectator's movement is critical to understanding their relationship.

To see Kline's paintings one must move across their surfaces. Hidden within these paintings is our contemporary search for identity, for a personal space of becoming. From this perspective, a dialectic is set up between the materiality of the paintings' frames and the mirage-like apparition of thinly pigmented veils and rectangles contained within them. These barely suggested forms speak to the uncertainty of an infinite regress. In this *mise-en-abyme*, what version are they of themselves? As the artist notes, they are neither "screen, scaffold, surface, or support." What is left, then? A frame—not of an image, a landscape, or an object—but the echo of our time from within a diversity of voices, across a multiplicity of social engagements and critical platforms.

In counterpoint to Kline's framing of a contemporary voice, Lau's poetic animations embody a historical insistence on gender difference and identity, evoked by the songs of the *Nüshu* language of women in Imperial China's Shangjiangxu Township, Hunan province.

Some days later, it is high noon and I am sitting in my garden admiring the depth of the shadows cast by the light of the midday sun. I am reminded again of Lau's two *Echo Chambers*. In use until the advent of modern China, *Nüshu* was developed from classical Chinese characters, by women for women, and was intended as a vehicle for telling their stories, both woven and sung. It gave women an identity distinct from the patriarchal culture within which they lived their lives.

In each of the two facing *Echo Chambers* Lau introduces a surviving practitioner; in one a young woman and in the other an older woman, each chanting a traditional song, and each voice calling into being a different visual structure. The cast shadows of the scrolling scripts form an envelope for an ever-emerging melodic space and its narrative time. Significantly, the space occupied by the young voice is defined by the script moving over and through enclosing fluttering curtains, carrying a sense of possibility. In the opposite pavilion, the elder voice calls into being the walls of a home given greater definition by the shadows of the language sweeping and slowly penetrating the space, producing a sense of immanent loss, until even her voice fades into history. For Lau, this women's vanishing language represents the will of an identity denied by language itself, while framing the beauty and dignity of difference. Both artists address the complexity of a contemporary voice, our need for personal identity, and the search to find an individual voice within the diversity of current voices. If Kline and Lau define the challenges of our times, both suggest that the persistence of a personal vision resonates and lingers long after the viewer has moved on.

Yvonne Lammerich

Agnes Etherington Art Centre,
Kingston, April 25—August 6, 2018
Co-curated by Stephen Horne
and Sunny Kerr