

Ed Pien, 1700 La Poste, Montréal

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Ed Pien

← *Rope Play Drawing*, 2011; *Angel*, 2008–2018, installation view, 1700 La Poste, Montréal, 2018.

Photo : Guy L'Heureux, courtesy of 1700 La Poste, Montréal

↑ *Revel*, 2011, installation view, 1700 La Poste, Montréal, 2018.

Photo : Guy L'Heureux, courtesy of 1700 La Poste, Montréal

Ed Pien

Visual expressions of myth, ghost stories, and other folklore are often relegated to the status of craft, in the hierarchy of the fine arts. Emerging scholarship on folkloric art and craft examine how these do not, in fact, exist in binary opposition to fine art. Using craft methodology to approach this exhibition of Canadian artist Ed Pien at 1700 La Poste can allow us to consider new aspects of the work. As a Taiwanese-born artist who lives and works in the diaspora, the folkloric content of Pien's art possesses transcultural properties, complexifying understandings of Asian identity formation. Curator Isabelle de Mévius showcases the wide range of media that Pien uses, including drawing, photo, video, installation, and paper cutting.

Rope Play Drawing (2011) embodies this connection between Pien's practice and craft. Alone, it is an interlacing of rope threaded together to form a chaotic and colourful web. The piece is installed directly in front of the drawing, *Angel* (2008–2018), such that the viewer is unable to observe the drawing closely and must look through the rope web. This placement constructs a reading of both works that also informs how the viewer should approach all of Pien's drawings, as layered weavings of realities and memories. The artist's hand and body are present throughout, and this is particularly clear in the visceral quality of *Amsterdam Suite: Cannibals and Other Monsters* (1999) and *Drawing on Hell II* (1997–1998) where umbilical cords and maternal bodies consume and excrete, reproduce and envelop, over and over again, relentlessly.

Given that hell is a major theme in Pien's body of work, visitors to the exhibition may be inclined to read the three floors of the gallery as some version of heaven, purgatory, and hell. Indeed the ground floor, displaying mostly large-scale or composite drawings as well as photo and video work, feels like the intermediate plane where spirits and demons

are all around us. On the mezzanine, the most eye catching of the three works is *Sea Change* (2017) because this intricate hand-cut shoji paper is laminated with 3M film, catching and reflecting sunlight. In descending the staircase however, any expectations of some representation of hell are undermined. Instead, the viewer is met with shimmering white light reflecting off the transparent structure in the centre of the room. *Revel* (2011) is a spiraling installation made of hand-cut Mylar, incorporating video projection and sound. The projection of a shadow appears intermittently on the wall, creating the illusion that someone is in the space with the viewer. In the video, the figure reaches up to adjust the small houses strung from the ceiling. Furthermore, the walls of the installation are cut like the lacework on the mezzanine, creating a reflective effect like a spider web covered in water droplets.

Pien's ghosts and spirits do not exist in a distant memory or faraway culture; their world weaves and folds into our realities. Proving this is a key part of contemporary craft studies, particularly with regard to the place of folklore in art today.

Amelia Wong-Mersereau

1700 La Poste, Montréal

October 12, 2018—January 20, 2019



Ed Pien

† *Drawing on Hell II*, detail, 1997–1998.

Photo : Guy L'Heureux, courtesy
of 1700 La Poste, Montréal