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Enter Cao Fei's Dreamlike World at Lombard Freid Gallery

ARTSY EDITORIAL

Chinese artist Cao Fei has an abiding interest in imagination and alternative realities. In her latest show, "La Town," at Lombard Freid Gallery, Cao presents a feature-length film of the same name and photographs that investigate a dark, mythical city. Through video and photographic works she investigates the ways in which people recapitulate the mundanities and social conditions of everyday life in virtual contexts. Among her inspirations is the social network Second Life, which allows users to build and interact in a virtual environment with avatars of their own creation. Cao's work engages in a dialogue with new media contemporaries such as Jon Rafman and Michael Bell-Smith, exploring the ways that people interact with one another and use digital environments to reinvent or embellish reality.

Her live action film made with miniatures, *La Town* (2014), employs a film noir aesthetic and focuses on a narrative about a fabled town where there's no sunlight and time stands still. The artist engages in film traditions making reference to classics like *The Godfather* and the 2007 horror film *30 Days of Night*, while delving into themes of memory and forgetting. In *La Town*, Cao constructs a new, autonomous space, freed from the social structures of the world, without humans acting or enacting imaginary personae. Instead, Cao presents a cinematic vision, featuring tiny figurines who navigate a carefully constructed, fictional world that has gone awry.

Photographs of the set where *La Town* was created are shown alongside the movie, giving a more studied view of the film. In *13 White Street* (all 2014), viewers are presented with a post-apocalyptic scene: a destroyed McDonalds restaurant is perched atop of a small apartment building while figurines mill about in the rubble of wrecked cars and the detritus of buildings. A Ferris wheel can be seen in the background adding to the absurdity of the chaotic village. Another scene, *Train Station*, is less anarchic but no less ominous: a flooded train platform populated by people and exotic animals such as pelicans and camels. The clear water reflects the architecture and inhabitants in its smooth, glassy surface. Beyond the intricate and intriguing narrative behind Cao's vivid imagery and storytelling, the extreme precision with which she renders the details of this dreamlike world is stunning.



Cao Fei
Train Station, 2014
Lombard Freid Gallery



Cao Fei
Center Plaza, 2014
Lombard Freid Gallery