

Blogs

Wenny Teo: Lee Kit's 'You (you)' is Great (Great)

Lee Kit is precisely the kind of artist that people either love or hate. Those from the sneering "my-kid-could-do-that!" school of spectatorship will want to stay well clear of the young Hong Kong artist's solo show, but everyone else should make it a point to visit. Indeed there's no excuse not to—the Hong Kong pavilion is conveniently located just outside the main entrance to the Arsénale. Close enough to the action but not quite in it. Lee delicately references this sense of dislocation and "othering" (and all that it entails within the context of the Biennale's geopolitics) with the intriguing title of this evocative exhibition, "You (you)". Similarly to Lee's recent display at Shanghai's Minsheng Art Museum last year, the installation is painfully sparse, consisting of utilitarian, everyday objects scattered around a white washed room. The unpolished space is dotted with traces of inhabitancy: a T-shirt neatly hung up, a postcard tacked to the wall, a folded towel on a desk, a plastic bucket, a vacuum cleaner, a glass lying on its side. One gets the impression that the space has only just been vacated by a fastidiously neat squatter. A number of TV monitors play painfully mundane yet mesmerising videos of casual repeated actions or isolated household products shot from different angles, as a sound system nearby emits a quiet, melancholic tune.



Lee Kit's sparse installation is dense with meaning

Lee's exhibitions might not be a lot to look at but they are compelling, charged with paradoxical sensations of intimacy and alienation, boredom and tenderness. They are spaces of enclosure and interiority, yet stripped of artistic self-indulgence. Lee's strength is his unobtrusive ability to simply set a tone, create a mood, trigger a memory or convey a sensation. We are left to fill in the gaps with our own personal recollections. Indeed, the exhibition isn't all about Lee, it's all about "(you)". It's no doubt a marked contrast to the visual intensity and theoretical complexity of "The Encyclopaedic Palace" that one encounters within the Arsénale, but just as valuable an experience.

The exhibition is co-presented by the soon-to-be-opened M+ Museum in Hong Kong, the highly anticipated gem of the sprawling West Kowloon Cultural District. The distinctly non-spectacular choice of Lee for the pavilion gives a very positive indication of the M+ Museums' future curatorial direction. The only jarring aspect of this highly nuanced exhibition, however, lies in the counter-intuitive decision to include a video in the courtyard of the curators discussing or rather explaining the subtlety of "You (you)" to you. Otherwise, Lee's exhibition is certainly one of the best this year.

Wenny Teo is the Iwan and Manuela Wirth lecturer of Modern and contemporary Asian Art at the Courtauld Institute of Art