

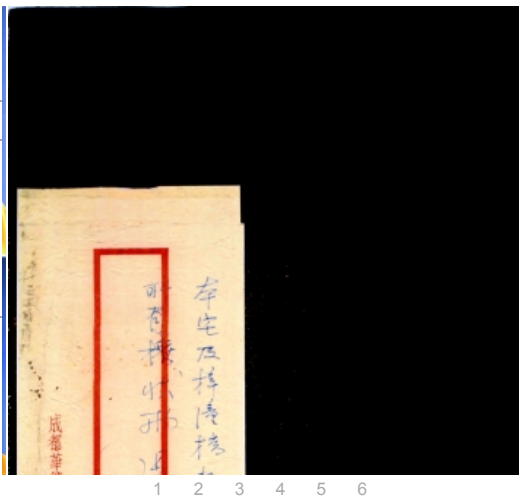


One Suitcase Per Person

Posted: 7 Dec 2011

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1a space Until Jan 31

A quick glance of the exhibition title and you could easily mistake this show as being about the banality of travel. Taken from the title of a painting by artist David Diao, the word 'suitcase' is, in fact, a metaphorical remembrance to the broader context and meaning of cultural identity, especially for someone who has left his homeland and is stripped of any direct physical connection to it. The succinct selection of works provides a multi-faceted critique on the lingering issues that stem from globalisation and multiculturalism, and are seen through the eyes of three different generations of artists: Diao, Ken Lum and Hiram To, whose artistic practices are similarly influenced by their own migratory experiences.

The strongest work in the show lies in Diao's *Da Hen Li* series, composed of more than 20 variously sized paintings loosely spread over an entire wall on the left-hand side of the space. Deeply sentimental and personal yet aesthetically abstract, the work is at once a collage-like pictorial and textual account of not only the history of his old home, Da Hen Li in Chengdu (where Diao lived before relocating to the States at the age of six), but, more importantly, of his own personal relationship with his Chinese heritage and identity. The perpendicular, minimalist-like lines seen throughout the acrylic and mixed media paintings – *Death on Tennis Court* (2007), *From Da Ba* (2007) and *To Construct 1* (2008) – echo the

parallel between the perimeter of a building and the invisible guideline that drives the construction of cultural identity.

If Diao's *Da Hen Li* series is a solemn biographical attempt in archiving the lineage of Da Hen Li and its fleeting presence in relation to the artist's own history, then Lum's *Schnitzel Company* (2004) across the room extends and overtly points towards the social and corporate phenomenon that exists and emerges from the multicultural communion of the individuals. Triggered by the idea of the 'employee of the month' scheme frequently floating within service-oriented companies, images of racially divergent men and women carrying identical smiles and in matching yellow 'Schnitzel Company' uniform visually brighten and dominate the inner gallery space.

In the midst of Diao's quiet contemplation and Lum's satirical screech situates To's recent photograph-based series *Fortune Landscapes* (2011), which serves as a visually seductive discourse on the Hollywood cinematic perception of the East, using Hong Kong as its fulcrum. Though placed at the front of the gallery, the direct contrast between the saturated film still in the background and the strategic flower arrangement on top in *Fortune Landscape 1* (2011) and *Fortune Landscape 2* (2011) certainly further serves as an introspective haven for the audience in between the viewing of Diao and Lum's works.

Piper Koh