

'It's (kind of) a love story.'

The human pursuit of connectivity, filled with longing and desire, its potential for intimacy, as well as its latent pitfalls, is at the heart of the paintings in 'It's (kind of) a love story' by Jade Ching-yuk Ng now showing at Natasha Arselan Gallery. Across a series of flawlessly executed figurative paintings, reality and fiction collide in vivid polychromatic and luscious works, full of allegory and emotional entanglements. With art- historical, contemporary, and autobiographical references, Ching-yuk Ng re-counts complex histories while exploring the tensions and paradoxes present in our intimate and romantic relationships. Visually, the work cites structural and pictorial movements and assembled non-linear constructions of Futurist painters like Fortunato Depero, stemming from the artist's long-standing interest and interrogation of the traditional modernist and classical art historical canon and its use of mythology and storytelling.

Central figures whose gaze never meet are intertwined and consumed by each other, their interactions in constant flux between touch and proximity, contrasted with distance and estrangement. In "*Rib-bon*," two lovers are connected by a red ribbon, wrapping its way around them like a vein, becoming a representation of interdependence, wild adoration and passion. At the same time, the lover's tender touch is met with a violent stabbing by the other, a seemingly cold and detached exchange which illicit little emotional response by either protagonist. The painting contradicts tenderness with violence and agony, an element of danger entangled in desire. Clashing movements are repeated throughout the paintings, and the interlocking figures are surrounded with symbolic imagery that creates non-linear narratives: figures suspended in time and place. Referencing the French writer Alfred Jarry, Ching-yuk Ng plays with the idea of pataphysics, rooted in a surrealist approach where human encounters are accepted as layered and extraordinary experiences, illustrated through the allegorical use of objects and symbolism.

In "*Mask off in Our Timeless Hours*," a female figure holds what appears to be an ox-eye daisy, evocative of a game of 'he loves me, he loves me not,' a nostalgic throwback to a time of early childhood crushes. Contrasting this wistful and romantic narrative this painting once again holds a counter history, as the other hand lightly clutches a carnevalesque violet mask. Masks are repeated throughout the works, blurring the lines between moments of revelation and concealed emotions. The title of the work hints at this unmasking, a single teardrop falling from the fractured face as the central figure discloses an underlying sadness. The female figure in "*Pf, Pf...*" on the other hand, has a cool and vacant look in her eyes as she holds a cigarette in each hand. Here we are transported to another time, old Hollywood or perhaps a summer fling from many years ago, as the two cigarettes hint at a shared moment, maybe one of post-coital bliss. The linking of female seduction, sex, and smoking is cinematic, ingrained in our collective consciousness as powerful and alluring protagonists transport the act of smoking into a metaphorical realm.

Ching-yuk Ng's female protagonists capture your imagination in aloof yet powerful ways, but they also defy an initially straight forward gendered reading. A blue shadow figure, appearing as a recurring motif within these works, obscures and grips the female subject. Intimately intertwined with her, it is unclear whether this figure is separate from or an extension of the self.

Is the figure a masculine reflection of the female self? Transformation and consumption become inextricably linked within the paintings, as the two figures ultimately merge and metamorph into one fluid, genderless being. The interplay and interchanging of gender and narrative move throughout these works: revealing many possible readings and interpretations. It is the embracing of this complexity and avoidance of a reductive narrative which makes the paintings in 'It's (kind of) a love story' a great success, showcasing the entanglement of eros, beauty and mythology encompassing the timeless story of love.

By Jeanette Gunnarsson