

Time Out

Review: Topophilia

A varied exhibition in the newly opened BANK gallery space

published on 7 Apr 2014

Newly opened in MABSOCIETY's BANK gallery space, *Topophilia* is easily one of the most enjoyable exhibitions in town at the moment. For one thing, there's free beer and cigarettes as part of Michael Lin's 'Import' installation. For another, there's an inflatable Audi saloon car that you're invited to whack with inflatable mallets (in Rania Ho's '50 Ways to Leave Your Lover'). These are just two of the dozen works on display, loosely anchored by the exhibition's underlying theme of a sense of place – the topophilia of the show's title.

Before you reach the works, the place where they are found is worthy of note itself. After leaving Shanghai Gallery of Art at the tail end of 2012, Mathieu Aleksandr Borysevicz founded 'international curatorial and consultancy firm' MABSOCIETY, but until last summer they were a 'gallery without a space'. Then he landed upon a venue on the second floor of the Bank Union Building, a short walk from the Rockbund Art Museum. BANK's setting is considerably less polished than RAM's, with the 1929 structure that houses the gallery feeling a little decrepit, but this adds to the experience of *Topophilia* – for example, is the stepladder with a can of milk tea perched on one step an exhibit or a temporarily-abandoned workman's set-up? (It turns out to be the former with the milk tea can operating as a speaker for audio recordings of a recent visit to Shanghai in US-based artist Amy Yao's 'Mother's Little Helper, A is for Amy, A is for Asia, climb..., climb...')

In addition to installations the space houses a number of fascinating video works. At the far end of BANK, viewers are invited into a small, dark space where Taiwanese artist Chen Chieh-jen's 'Empire's Borders I' examines the visa application process for Taiwanese citizens going to the United States and Mainland Chinese wives aiming to join their spouses in Taiwan. Both groups relate tales of intense scrutiny and bureaucracy, with most applicants ultimately being turned down, something that the artist himself has experienced.

Next door, Patty Chang and David Kelley's *Shangri-La* series is an exploration through photography, sculpture and video of the fictional location in James Hilton's 1933 novel *Lost Horizon*. In the video at the centre of the work a large, shiny structure is placed on the back of a pickup truck and transported around the area of Yunnan said to be Hilton's inspiration, with the results looking like something out of a blinged-up *Robot Wars*. The film flits between documentary and more surreal episodes as the sculpture makes its journey. There's more video present in the aforementioned '50 Ways...', with a small screen at the wheel of the life-size inflatable Audi showing recordings of the artist and other participants going to town on the car in full skateboard get-up (pads, helmet etc). It should be lost on no-one who the usual passengers in blacked-out Audi cars are here.

After you've exerted yourself on the car, Michael Lin's 'Import' is a welcome installation. Set out like a mini-beer hall, Lin's work invites viewers to help themselves to packets of Long Life cigarettes and cans of Taiwan Beer under the gaze of big paintings of the companies' logos. The Taiwanese products have not only been imported into the Mainland for consumers, but also as a diplomatic gesture across the Straits and the artist posits that by consuming the goods here in Shanghai, we are completing the intended loop. As the selection of works described above demonstrates, *Topophilia* is a varied exhibition. But it's one that is consistently challenging, intriguing and thoroughly gratifying throughout. Don't miss it.

Topophilia is at BANK until May 24.

Jake Newby