Q & A

Towards an Aesthetic of Excess: A Conversation with Laura Kina and Việt Lê

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[The artworks of Laura Kina and Việt Lê] highlight the nuanced nature of Transnational Lives in Motion among Asian American and Pacific Islander communities. Despite Asian Americans’ contributions to the U.S. for over three centuries, the perceptions of these communities are relegated to thinking of them as ‘perpetual foreigners’ or consigned to model minority stereotypes. The shifting global standing of Asian countries has changed the discourse to take into account that Asian Americans are neither here nor there, but everywhere, as they actively partake in transnational lives. (...) Policies, wars, employment, and family reunifications have led to the movement of Asian lives across the globe, transcending nations, and blurring global boundaries as their lives are in motion. (...) Transnational Lives in Motion: The Art of Laura Kina and Việt Lê examines the ways in which Asian American transnationals construct and reconstruct the fabric of their identities based on their location, space, and time. From mixed-race identities with global connections, to communities who seek
refuge in the U.S. from the legacies of wars, this exhibit highlights a few issues, which impact immigrant, refugee, and multi-racial ethnic communities living transnational lives.

—Mary Yu Danico and Michele Cairella Fillmore1

Curated by Mary Yu Danico (the Weglyn Endowed Chair of Multicultural Studies) and Michele Cairella Fillmore (Director of the Kellogg University Art Gallery), Transnational Lives in Motion: The Art of Laura Kina and Việt Lê took place at the W. Keith & Janet Kellogg University Art Gallery at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, California, US, from 27 February through 23 April 2016. The pairing of our two solo exhibitions initially puzzled us because on the surface, our art seemed to share little in common aesthetically. Standing in the gallery together at the opening, however, we quickly realized that despite our differences, we both share pop sensibilities. We call this an “aesthetic of excess,” which blurs the lines between “high” fine art and “low” popular cultures, the flamboyant and mundane, and embraces colour, spectacle, and decorative impulses. We both also chart communal identities, “disidentifications,” and history as subjects with ties to Asia, America, and in-between.2 The curators described our work in the exhibition text in this way:

Kina’s Uchinanchu combines Asian and Pacific Islander pop-culture textiles, fabrics, and T-shirts, formulated into colorful, large-scale tapestries, with traditional painting motifs addressing how the assimilation of multiple cultures fold meticulously into one personal, yet collective, journey. Việt Lê’s lovebang! Trilogy Premiere includes video installations lovebang!, eclipse, and the world premiere of heARTbreak!—each, together, transect the topics of Asian pop-culture, hip-hop, sex, homo-eroticism, and being transgender with struggle and war, nostalgia and heARTbreak.

1 Mary Yu Danico and Michele Cairella Fillmore, “Transnational Lives in Motion: The Art of Laura Kina and Việt Lê,” exhibition text, W. Keith & Janet Kellogg University Art Gallery at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, California, February 2016.

2 The term “disindentification” is culled from José Muñoz’ work on queer subject positionings and identitarian politics. See José Esteban Muñoz, Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).