

I FELT THAT

CURATED BY JOSEPHINE BAILEY

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An interview with Qingqing Liu



Q: Dystopian futures seem to be very relevant to your practice as a performer and artist. How do you see the gender pain gap as a part of this, if at all?

A: The Gender Pain gap for me is not only about the physical aspects of pain (menstruation, childbirth, etc.) but also about the many secondary harms that accompany the unequal power positions between genders. In my 2018 Moving Image work M0ther, I collected, selected, and used many images about motherhood in art history and pop culture. To go about creating a mother is at the same time tearing apart/destroying a woman's body and life. The inspiration came from my childhood misconceptions about my mother, who was a cool professional woman who was also very busy and didn't spend much time at home with me always envied children whose mothers were housewives, whose mothers wore gentle pink cardigans and pearl necklaces, who would cook for them and wait for them at the school gates at the end of the school day. I used to wonder why my mum was so far removed from the classic media images of mothers and wasn't very good at looking after me. It wasn't until I became a woman of child-bearing age myself that I realised the courage and cost of being a woman, experiencing these physical injuries and the huge impact on my life, to become a mother, and the pressure I might have to face to be a mother who deviates from the mainstream.

Q: Why are you drawn to performance? What do you feel is different when conveying complex ideas in performance than with any other medium?

A: I enjoy working with timelines in my art, time is something that fascinates me. For me, the difference between moving image and performance is that a moving image is a fragment of a landscape taken out of time and space, which can then be used to loop in any scene in time. The timeline of performance is the present, a period that we performers and the audience

enjoy together. And, in my performance, I use the human body as a material. This is closely linked to an interest I have been researching: how do you feel as a fluid body. I am curious about where we as human bodies go in the timeline, and whether the world that embraces us after each of our bodies has passed through time is a world of bliss, an infinite hell, or an endless void?

Q: Your performance “Trigger Warning” draws upon some really painful and poignant references. Could you go through some of them? Why did you choose these?

A: In this performance, I use many of the worldviews of traditional oriental culture on life and death and the cycle of life. At the beginning of my life, I lived with my grandmother due to my parents' busy schedules and the fact that we lived in different cities. We lived in a small town in southern China, with the television on day and night, and the TV Channel showed a bunch of old Hong Kong movies every night filled with the spectacle of pretty women, violence, ghosts, and swear words. One of the famous filmmakers Lam Ching Ying's zombie films had a great impact on me, and his production of horrific yet beautiful scenes such as the Underworld Wedding, Red and White Crash the Furies, and Hell Visit is deeply ingrained in my mind. The image of a female ghost who died unjustly appears in almost every Chinese ghost film. They are always soft, sad, and resentful, abused or abandoned by their clans or husbands, and their hatred lingers long after their death. This image is perhaps an outgrowth of the subconscious of society as a whole, and there are too many of these sad stories happening, or happening now — there was one in China earlier this year that shocked the nation: The Xuzhou chained woman incident. It is a case of human trafficking, severe mistreatment, and subsequent events in Feng County, Xuzhou. The video of a mentally disturbed and imprisoned woman who was chained to a wall and who gave birth to eight children went viral on China's internet. Due to strict political control and censorship of media in China, some netizens were arrested while investigating the case. This shows that the basic respect and protection of women from top to bottom of society is still far from adequate and we need to continue to work on this matter.



Qingqing Liu, Trigger Warning: But I Never Saw Her Pray, 2022, Performance

Q: How has your experience over the past three months impacted your final performance?

Over the past three months, curator Josephine has organised all of us artists, poets, and performers working on the I felt that exhibition into a community, where we share books and videos in a group chat and have regular weekly sharing sessions. We talk about art, about exhibitions, about our intimate experiences as women, about our embarrassment, hesitation or anger. These exchanges give me a lot of inspiration from the exploration of themes and the formation of visual language. For example, I used a swaying red veil in the performance because we talked about the texture of the veil and the traditional femininity in one of the reading groups. And it set this exhibition apart from many others I've been to, we weren't just strangers putting up work for a few days, but there was a real and effective connection

between people, I felt that we were working together on something. it was great to meet so many amazing new friends!

A: You mention that your work “trigger warning” speaks to the objectification of women in society, could you explain this further. How do you try present this?

I read this question just as I finished reading the news about Abortion banned in multiple US states just hours after Roe v Wade overturned. What infuriates me is this: do we want half the world's population to exist only as wombs without the power to make decisions about their bodies? Do politicians think that women who give birth will not feel pain when the unborn fetus will feel pain? The result of the event was that the politicians gained votes, the civil society gained attention and donations, and only the suffering and sacrifice were carried by the current generation of women. In my costume design for the performance, I have deliberately weakened the presence of the performer's body as a full-body, preferring instead to cut and bind, with a little fetish element. I used flesh-coloured silicone in my installation, a wedding sedan that also has red thread and pigment to make it look a bit like a scarred body. I wanted to question the legitimacy of the persecution of the female body through the existence of the marital relationship in traditional society through such a hyphenated image.

Q: Red is a strong feature in your work for I felt that. To me, this feels culturally relevant of course, but seems to refer to blood and pain in its strength. How do you feel about this interpretation of your work?

A: Thank you for your interpretation, obviously red inevitably becomes a reference to blood or pain in any cultural context, but for me, it may be more than that. First of all, red is sexy, sexy is important, and I think sexy is a power, magic in gender power. Red is also the colour that pops into my head when I think of eroticism. Eroticism as a product of human sexual taboos is a transgression of human sexual taboos. In the opening preface to his treatise on eroticism, Georges Bataille says: 'The so-called erotic can be described as the affirmation of life until death' (l'approbation de la vie jusque dans la mort). He argues that death and sex have the capacity to communicate, to 'communicate', to transcend the divide between people, and to become one with the other. Both death and sexuality offer the opportunity for the solitary individual to communicate, to dissolve, to converge and to connect with others. Each of us is born in a red, bloody scene, and without sex, we would not have been born or died.

Secondly, on the cultural part, firstly red and white each represent the joy of marriage and the funeral burial in the culture of my home country, China, hence the abbreviation red for marriage and white for burial. Our performance is about a wedding in the underworld, so I have used a lot of red and the traditional Chinese wedding word Xi (囍). In Chinese Taoist rituals, the Taoist priests use vermilion pens to write incantations to ward off evil spirits, which is a red mineral pigment that has the effect of warding off evil spirits. One of the references in this performance also features ancient Chinese spells, an image that appears on the wedding palanquin installation I made, and on the performer's body. It was once believed that by writing a spell on a piece of yellow paper with a vermilion pen in the order of the

strokes and using it in a specific place, many purposes could be achieved. In an ancient Qing dynasty book now in the Harvard University collection, "The Complete Book of Tenzhou Spells", there is a collection of spells with all sorts of magical powers that could cure illnesses such as "a spell to make the unjust spirits spacing the couple's love", "a spell to invite the gods to send the immortals", or the more bizarre or the more bizarre "make clothes and hats move by themselves out of thin air". Although I am not sure if the spells are effective, I believe that the contemporary spells that are inflicted on women by willing are definitely real and effective.