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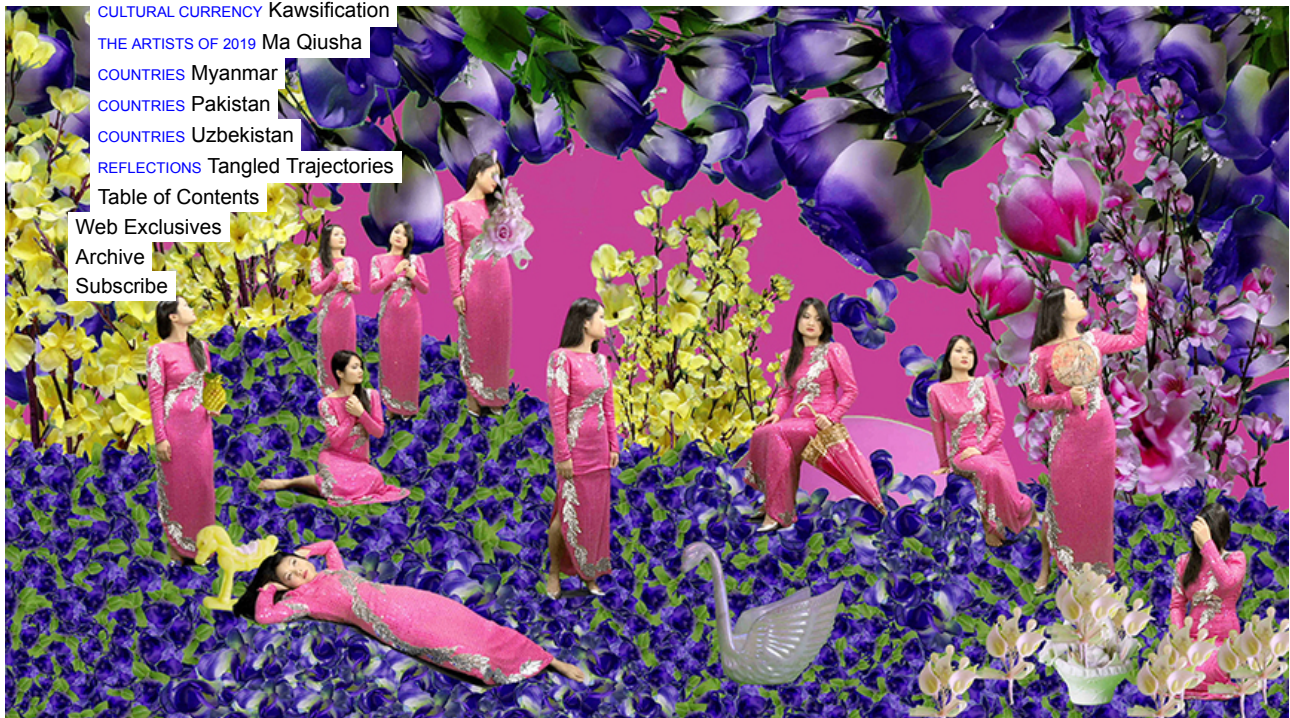
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QUYNH DONG, *Sweet Noel*, 2013, still from video: 7 min 39 sec. Courtesy the artist and Yeo Workshop, Singapore.

LONG JOURNEY QUYNH DONG

MARYBETH STOCK
YEO WORKSHOP

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QUYNH DONG, *My Paradise*, 2012, still from video: 15 min. Courtesy the artist and Yeo Workshop, Singapore.

Emerging artist Quynh Dong is exhibiting for the first time in Singapore at Yeo Workshop, which is presenting a modest introduction to Dong's digitized works entitled "Long Journey." Based in Zürich, Dong immigrated to Switzerland from Vietnam as a child, and her surreal, still-evolving video and performance practice reflects this layered identity. Dong's works at Yeo involve three vibrant video pieces, accompanied by a muted, deceptively incongruous ceramics installation.

Allegory and myth—both ancient and contemporary—inspire Dong. At Yeo, her exhibition title refers to a 16th-century classical Chinese novel, *Journey to the West*, the saga of a magical pilgrimage towards enlightenment. Dong launches her own stylized performances as "journeys" of parable and metaphor, while projecting traditional and pop symbolism as delightfully absurd satire.

Two of the works shown at Yeo are hallucinogenic reveries. Dong's video canvas *Sweet Noel* (2013) is modeled after the late Vietnamese artist Nguyễn Gia Trí's (1908–1993) lacquer painting depicting women in formulaic "feminine" poses. In *Sweet Noel*, Dong reboots the conventional composition by injecting herself into the scenario as a flurry of identical, candy-pink figures enveloped in garish flowers—she

also sings the karaoke-like soundtrack. Not much happens except for the colors, which are super-saturated and delightfully fizzy on the eye. The pensive images of the artist shift slightly; a sprinkling of snow falls, a lone yellow rocking horse traverses the screen, and the tableau's radiant artificiality channels "beauty" into stupefying monotony. As a sendup of cultural stereotypes and female identity, *Sweet Noel* is, intentionally, cloyingly direct, while the more allusive *My Paradise* (2012) is laden with a gaudy jumble of precious cultural icons, and features the artist's own parents as protagonists. *My Paradise* is a sardonic commentary on the yearning for Eden, via the cultural props of materialism and dreams. It comprises a series of childlike digitized tableaux that stage Dong's mother and father as dreamy, blissful figurines within "Oriental"-style maquettes (fantastic tchotchke-constructs made by the artist's father). Dong serves up her family within the context of kitschy clichés about "The Orient" that reinforces an overblown nostalgia fed by mythic imagery. Settings include a teahouse, a temple and a half-moon Chinese bridge, where the couple enact mute tableaux vivant that portray a one-dimensional life in "paradise": tending a garden of enormous flowers; riding flying horses; and gazing in rapture at a rainbow, along with self-absorbed smoking and texting. Dong's weird theater, with its stilted and solemn *Noh*-like gestures, skews triviality into sly fables.



QUYNH DONG, *My Paradise*, 2012, still from video: 15 min. Courtesy the artist and Yeo Workshop, Singapore.

Alongside these compositions in high camp, the sparse imagery of Dong's video poem *Late Autumn* (2015) is pure haiku. Its setting is a desolate tree in a colorless landscape. Dong's red-clad figure appears and fades in cycles, like slow-falling leaves from the branches. This solemnity is drenched in an amorphous soundtrack that wavers from "Asian" tonalities to that of the violin. At Yeo, a modest scattering of ceramic melons is placed directly before the *Late Autumn* screen. This series, "Please to Me" (2015), consists of some two dozen perfect melon-forms in dark, textural glazes—some glossy, others matte. Their subtle streaks of pattern have a gentle integrity, which, in tandem with the restraint of *Late Autumn*, are in utter contrast with the ferocious plasticity of *My Paradise* and *Sweet Noel*. Both *Late Autumn* and "Please to Me" evolved out of Dong's artist residency in Korea last year. If she continues to pursue this mannered abstraction alongside the absurdities of emotional kitsch, it will be interesting to follow the artist's aesthetic journey going forward.



Installation view of QUYNH DONG's exhibition "Long Journey" at Yeo Workshop, Singapore, 2016. Left: *Late Autumn* (2015) and "Please to Me" (2015). Courtesy the artist and Yeo Workshop.

Quynh Dong's "Long Journey" is on view at Yeo Workshop, Singapore, until February 28, 2016.

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