NIGHTHAWKNYC.COM
8 Years
FINALIST
2023 ANDY WARHOL FOUNDATION ARTS WRITERS AWARD

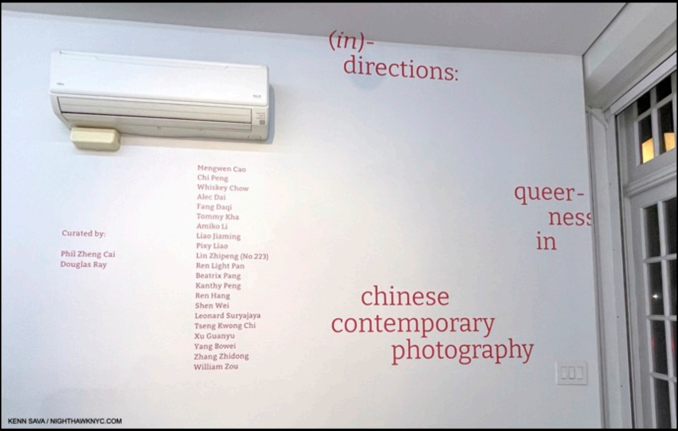
CONTEMPORARY CHINESE PHOTOGRAPHY: NEW DIRECTIONS

This *site is Free & Ad-Free! If you find this piece worthwhile, please donate via PayPal to support it & independent Art writing. You can also support it by buying Art & books! Details at the end. Thank you.*

Donate

Written & Photographed by Kenn Sava

Many might not associate China with Artistic freedom and free expression, but a number of Contemporary Chinese Photographers are making their mark, creating work that breaks all sorts of boundaries, and quite a bit of it in stunning fashion. *(in) directions: queerness in chinese contemporary photography*, up through the end of January at Eli Klein Gallery, long a leader in cutting-edge Contemporary Chinese Art & Photography, is nothing if not an eye-opener. Wonderfully curated by Phil Zheng Cai and Douglas Ray, the show includes the work of Artists not well-known, along with some that are better-known, including Ren Hang (1987-2017) and former East Village resident Tseng Kwong Chi (1950-90).


(in)-
directions:
queer-
ness
in
chinese
contemporary
photography
Curated by:
Phil Zheng Cai
Douglas Ray
Mengwen Cao
Chi Peng
Whiskey Chow
Alec Dai
Fang Daqi
Tommy Kha
Amiko Li
Liao Jiaming
Pixy Liao
Lin Zhipeng (No.223)
Ren Light Pan
Beatrix Pang
Kanthy Peng
Ren Hang
Shen Wei
Leonard Suryajaya
Tseng Kwong Chi
Xu Guanyu
Yang Bowei
Zhang Zhidong
William Zou

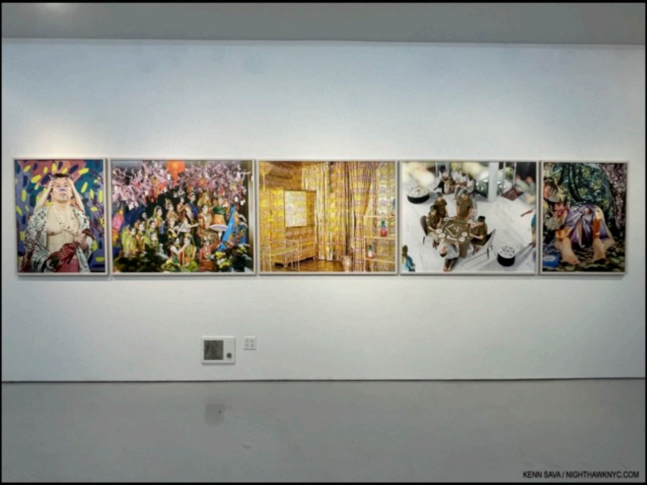
KENN SAVA / NIGHTHAWKNYC.COM

Walking through the show with Mr. Cai, who is a walking encyclopedia of knowledge on Contemporary Chinese Art, much of that knowledge based in personal experience with the Artists, I was again taken by the freshness on view in virtually every piece. It's so rare to walk into a Photography show and see very little, or virtually no, influence of Western Photography, save for an image or two that echoed Nan Goldin, (but that's possibly what I'm bringing to seeing it). At almost every turn, I saw things that were new, fresh, and exciting. Actually? That's what I've come to expect from Contemporary Chinese Art. In 2018, after seeing the landmark Guggenheim Museum overview in 2018, I began exploring it for the first time. Shortly after, at Eli Klein's prior gallery, Klein Sun's, amazing *Cai Dongdong: Photography Autocracy* I discovered the work of Mr. Dongdong, now one of the best known Chinese Photographers. It was a wake-up call to what was going on in Chinese Contemporary Photography, and I wrote an extensive look at the show here.

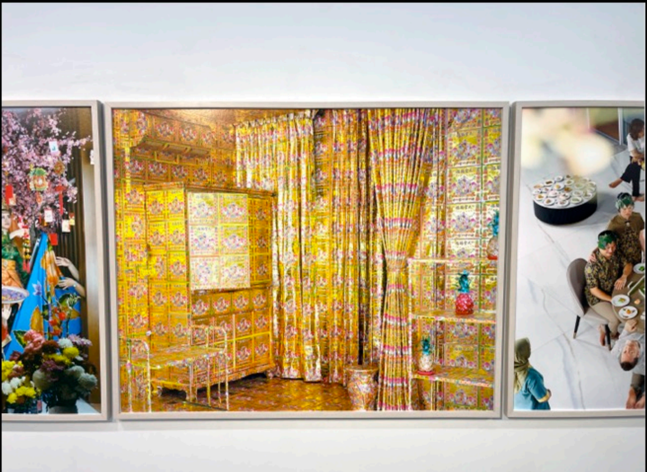
Of course, *(in) directions: queerness in chinese contemporary photography* revolves around queerness, which I readily admit to not being an authority on. Whether that interests you or not, there is much to discover and enjoy, particularly the range of styles and creativity on display.

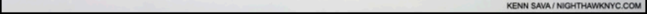
Cai Dongdong's work never fails to surprise or break new ground. From *(in) directions,* it seems he's far from alone in bringing that in Contemporary Chinese

Photography. See for yourself-


KENN SAVA / NIGHTHAWKNYC.COM

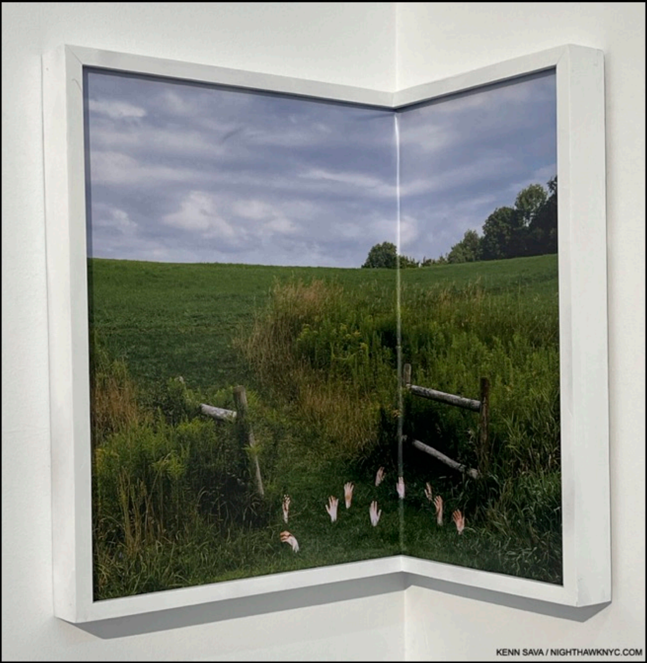
Leonard Suryajaya, *Dead Duck*, 2020, *Arisan*, 2017, *Gold Condo Room*, 2020, *Sparrow*, 2023 and *Salem*, 2014 from left. Archival inkjet prints.





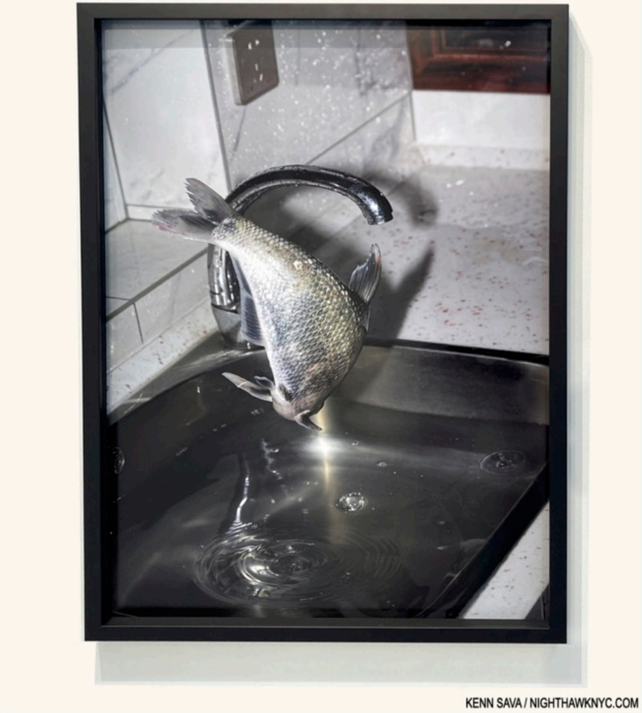
KENN SAVA / NIGHTHAWKNYC.COM

Leonard Suryajaya, *Gold Condo Room*, 2020.



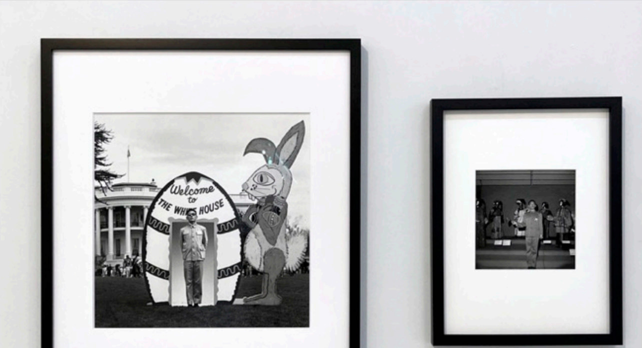
KENN SAVA / NIGHTHAWKNYC.COM

Tommy Kha, *Stops (III) Oneonta, NY*, 2020, UV print on vinyl.

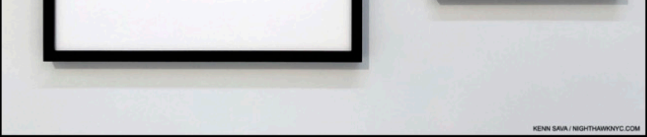


KENN SAVA / NIGHTHAWKNYC.COM

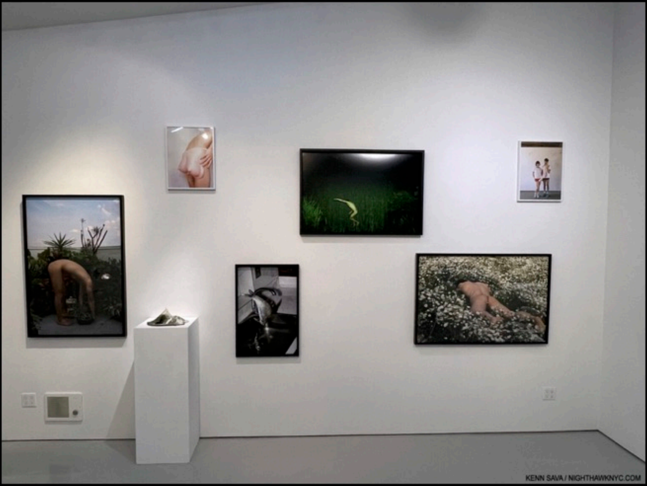
Fang Daqi, *Untitled (Bream)*, 2020, Archival pigment print



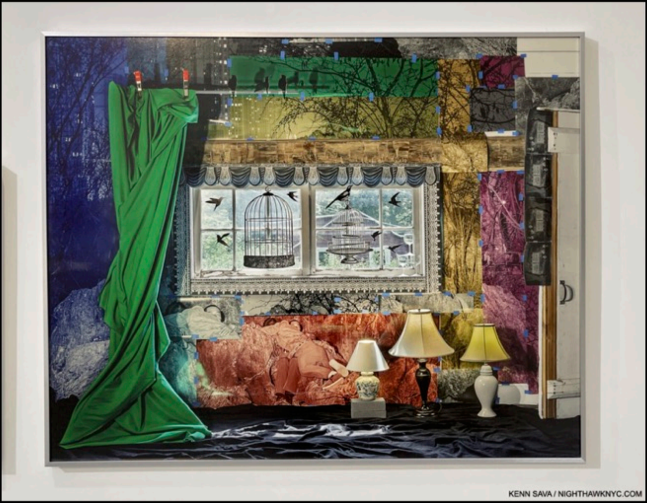
Welcome to
THE WH HOUSE


KENN SAVA / NIGHTHAWKNYC.COM

Tseng Kwong Chi, *Washington, D.C., 1982, From the "East Meets West self-portrait series 1979-89*, and *Tseng Kwong Chi with mannequins, 1980, From the "Costumes at the Met" series*, right. Both Silver gelatin prints.

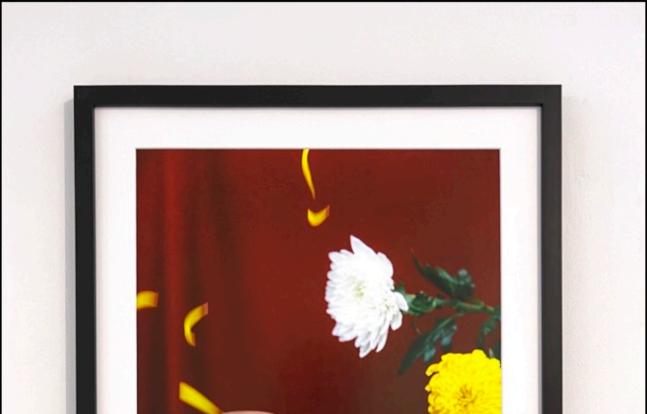

KENN SAVA / NIGHTHAWKNYC.COM

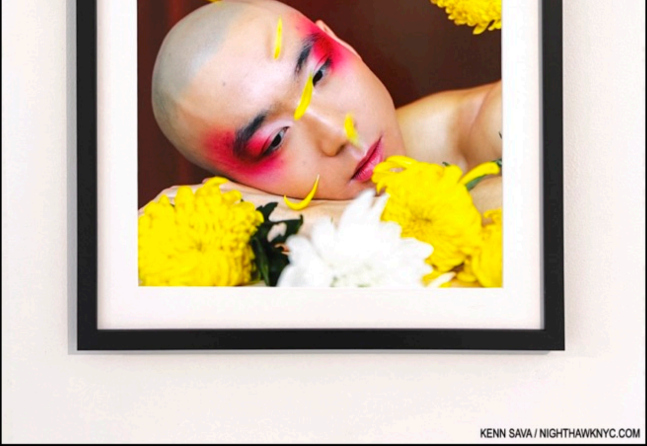
Shen Wei, *Bonsai*, 2023, Chromogenic print, *Blue Cave*, 2023, Mixed media, Pixy Liao, *Breast Ass*, 2019, Digital C-print, Fang Daqi, *Untitled (Bream)*, *Untitled (Butterfly 2)* both 2023, Shen Wei, *Daises*, 2022, Chromogenic print, Pixy Liao, *Long Sausage*, 2016, Digital C-print, from left.



KENN SAVA / NIGHTHAWKNYC.COM

Zhang Zhidong, *Object Lesson (II)*, 2023, Archival pigment print.




KENN SAVA / NIGHTHAWKNYC.COM

Mengwen Cao, *Eddy*, 2021, Archival pigment print.

KENN SAVA / NIGHTHAWKNYC.COM

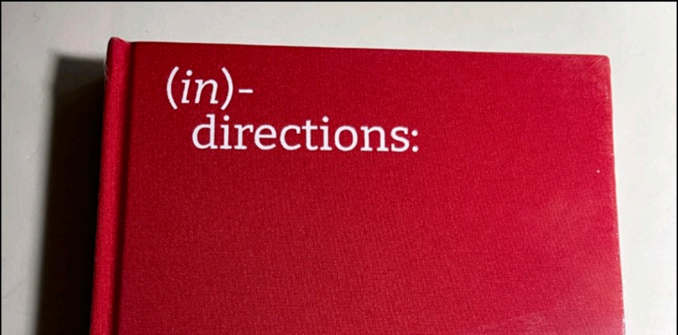
From left, Xu Guanyu, *SL-06172015-02112022*, 2022, and *Illumination*, 2014, Zhang Zhidong, *Reflection (II)*, 2023, *Lumination*, 2022 and *Object Lesson (II)*, 2023, All Archival pigment prints.

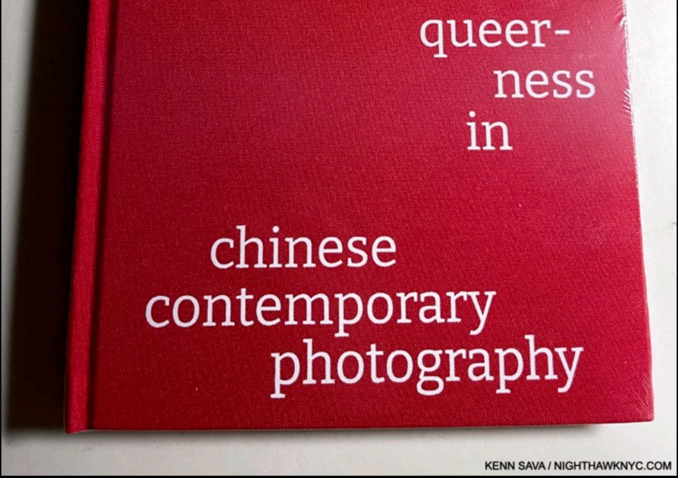
KENN SAVA / NIGHTHAWKNYC.COM

Co-curator Phil Zheng Cai with two of his favorites in the show by Tseng Kwong Chi.

My takeaway is that, regardless of where they're from, their age, orientation or medium, it's always exciting to see Artists doing something different. Doubly so when it's well done. Japanese Contemporary Photography has been very well-known in the U.S. for decades now, and some of its leading lights, like Daido Moriyama and Araki, are Art stars around the world. Chinese Photography is nowhere nearly as well-known here. With Artists and work like those on view in *(in) directions:*, I suspect that is about to change.

BookMarks- Books on Contemporary Chinese Photography are hard to come by here. Cai Dongdong's 4 PhotoBooks (that I'm aware of) were all printed in small numbers (up to 300 copies each) and have all sold out. However, one new book that is available as I write is *(in) directions:*, the catalog for this show. It's an excellent introduction to these Artists, often with texts in their own words, and including quite a few images of work not in the show (along with the work that is). Curators Cai and Ray, along with designer Mengyao Zhang, have done a very nice job of succinctly laying out quite a bit of material in a very accessible manner, producing a valuable upto-the-moment survery on 21 Photographers who deserve wider attention. Copies are available through Eli Klein Gallery.


(in)-
directions:


queer-
ness
in
chinese
contemporary
photography

KENN SAVA / NIGHTHAWKNYC.COM

*-Soundtrack for this piece is "Accept Yourself" by The Smiths from their classic *Hatful of Hollow*, seen here in a rare live, though grainy, video from the Hacienda, Manchester, on 6 July 1983-

The Smiths - Accept Your...

NighthawkNYC.com has been entirely self-funded & ad-free for over 8 years, during which 300 full-length pieces have been published! If you've found it worthwhile, PLEASE donate to allow me to continue below. Thank you, Kenn.

Donate

You can also support it by buying Art, Art & Photography books, and Music from my collection! Art & Books may be found here. Music here and here.

Written & photographed by Kenn Sava for nighthawknyc.com unless otherwise credited. To send comments, thoughts, feedback or propositions click here. Click the white box on the upper right for the archives or to search them. Subscribe to be notified of new Posts below. Your information will be used for no other purpose.

Name: Name...

Email: Email Address...

Submit

Posted on January 16, 2024 by Kenn Sava
This entry was posted in
BookMarks, Books, NYC Art Shows 2024, Photography, The Smiths, Tseng Kwong Chi

and tagged Contemporary Chinese Photography, NYC Art Shows 2024. Bookmark the permalink.

← FLACO OWNS THE CHARMER UNDER ME

PROUDLY POWERED BY WORDPRESS | THEME: TONAL BY WORDPRESS.COM.