

Hackney Gallery
5 June to 17 June 2024

Fairytale Ambitions

Press Release

Curated by Lydia Eliza Trail
with works by Issey Kang
and Giulia Ley



Issey Kang, ---, 2024



Giulia Ley, ----, 20--

Fairytale Ambitions question whether the desire to animate the inanimate is inherent to childhood. Prior to adolescence, it is in our nature to extract the fantastical from the mundane. We idolise that which adults disregard. Fairytale Ambitions examines the dialogue between play, psyche, and artistic creation through a series of craft objects and photographs that re-imbue the doll, once discarded by a now-grown young girl with a soul. Playthings are, as Baudelaire wrote, “the first initiation of the child to art”.

In the fashion of the Post-surreal and Post-internet, Kang and Ley use the Unheimlich (the uncanny) to make sense of the last decade - a period of endless digital pastiche, online insanity, millennial satirising and political abhorrence. We took from the idea of the Technoromantic (Kat Kitay; Spike Magazine) and de-virtualised online culture. Fairytale Ambitions is not escapist or indulgently pessimistic; rather, the exhibition mocks the self-infantilisation of contemporary society. In the face of turmoil, we return to fantasy. We explore the self-dissolving side of character dressing, akin to Cindy Sherman in her disturbed photographic series *Fairytales* (1985). This show mythologises a new set of fairytale archetypes, perverted by internet lingo; the pussy pirate, the slutty school shooter, the deformed Barbie doll, the zombie fighting heroine, the succubus and the impotent Ken doll. These new heroes can follow the yellow brick road out of the digital and into a tangible, crumbling gothic castle.

Dolls, Dollhouses, B-Movies, *American Sniper* (2014), Balthus, Sigmund Freud, *The Cosmetic*, *Silent Hill*, *Anna Karenina* (1873), *Plastic*, *The Bloody Chamber* (1979), Paula Rego, *Flash Games*, *Inertia*, *Morality*, *Steam Punk*.

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Issey Kang

Issey Kang is an artist who lives and works in London, graduating from Chelsea School of Art in 2022. Materiality is central to her work; paper, children's craft materials and objects associated with femininity form her practice. These elements reflect Kang's interest in tactility and frivolity while uniting old and modern methods of craft practice; her techniques involve découpage, letting, and rainbow loom.

"Little girls play with dolls, but grown women turn into dolls, or at least play at being dolls."

Annette Messenger

Kang's work brings Messenger's statement into conjunction with Judith Butler's 'Gender Troubles'. This sense of gender as performance plays out through my use of objects such as nail varnish, lipsticks, handbags and high heels, all under the guise of kitsch.

Kang's work connects this statement with the theories expressed in Judith Butler's 'Gender Troubles'. This sense of gender as performance plays out throughout her work – objects such as nail varnish, lipsticks, handbags and high heels are presented under the guise of a kitsch aesthetic.

Giulia Ley

Giulia Ley lives and works in London. She is a multi-disciplinary artist who graduated from Slade School of Art in 2023. Her work depicts and develops relationships with specific dolls, and she is fascinated by their strange appeal and universal familiarity. In Fairytale Ambitions, Giulia captures dolls through a camera lens. She endows them even further with a kind of humanity through the reverential nature of photographing and captures them from angles that appear momentarily indistinguishable from a real person. Akin to the process of painting, the act of photographing ushers figures in and out of existence. The dolls are like paintings, a vessel and solid matter, constrained by their materiality. Ephemeral, they oscillate between being and non-being: sometimes a person, sometimes a compound of red and white paint.