

***Between two oceans***

talk soon xxx | Yumoi Zheng | play\_station

27/10/22 - 19/11/22

Exhibition response written by Angel C Fitzgerald



On the way to Yumoi's opening I walked past a four way intersection and the wind was blowing flower petals up in the air. It reminded me of the scene from *Melancholia*. I was going to take a photo, but I've found myself less rushed to document everything around me - I want to feel everything a little more. It made me feel happy. I love the feeling of going to celebrate someone you love. I've often compared the feelings around gallery openings to feel similar to birthdays. I love to celebrate my friends.



*Melancholia* (2011) directed by Lars von Trier (Still)

When I climb the stairs to walk into the space, it is blue. The colour is cold. The blue light she's using in *talk soon xxx* is the same light she illuminates her bedroom with at night. Mood lighting. Movie night lighting. The light sends out a circle shaped light - like a moon.

The blue light reminds me of where me and Yumoi really started to connect. I'd come over to her house for movie nights and smoke cigarettes in her backyard and debrief about our days. This light was the backdrop of a lot of beautiful nights we'd had together. This blue space is a very personal and intimate space.

This light specifically is lighting up the work "communism tranny". A wall drawing done with red and silver, star and butterfly shaped stickers. The symbol itself described by Yumoi is a *combination of the communist hammer and sickle, the chinese flag, and the transgender symbol*.



Working drawing of 'communism tranny'

*Talk soon xxx* feels like an attempt to articulate a large body of thought. Funnelled through a filter of humour, cute, and well thought through ideas. This space feels light, warm, cold. It feels intimate, yet sharp / harsh. I feel an emphasis on movement.

Witnessing Yumoi figure out what this show would be has been a pleasure. It's been through many phases. In the back of my mind I wondered if this show would be too much, and then I'd encourage her to push it further. There's been a back and forth - a push and pull. I like how this show makes me feel a little bit nervous.

*talk soon xxx* kind of feels like a mirror, maybe I mean a portal. It shows a world of what could be. Visually, but also emotionally. This show feels like a key, or a door. A freedom of expression. A burst of energy. I feel in awe of her ability to (at least seemingly) not care about using certain words, exploring certain topics, and being honest with herself and others in her art. The work holds dignity and power, I forget about the conversations with Yumoi where she expressed her nerves around the show.

When people have asked me what the show is about I keep saying "it's Yumoi introducing herself". I think at surface level I can see that, but once I'm standing in the space, it's a lot more complex than this. It's deeply personal. It features footage of her family - both blood and chosen. It features poetry from her phone notes. I feel like I'm inside her brain. Like she's reading me her diary.



*Phone note poetry*, 2022. Video and sound, 18 mins. (still)

Her work *Phone note poetry*, is a beautiful articulation of her exploration in gender, family relations, her friends, the ocean, stickers, her ability to hold love & hate. It's gentle, brutal, soft, hard hitting. The writing is taken directly from her phone notes— a space where thoughts and words often don't leave that small application on your phone. She's displaying it for us, but also creating a visual landscape for us to enjoy the words in.

I love this work. I mean, I have used similar methods in my work, so maybe I'm biased (aside from the fact I am obsessed with Yumoi). I think when writing and video meet, a very special synthesis happens. You hear the words rather than simply listening to them. You see a story while watching. Teleported while reading. It's a beautiful experience.

I see this work as a result of Yumoi trying to understand her surroundings. I find writing as such a useful tool for this. And same with filming. Or at least video. I usually write when I feel insane, at a tipping point, needing to articulate the chaos circling in my brain. I use video as a tool to play. A backdrop. A translation.

Yumoi moved to Aotearoa when she was 15 years old. She's now 24. And she's lived here without blood family the entire time. Her only way to connect back home - especially with the travel restrictions since the pandemic - is through a phone screen. In the last two years of not being able to go back home, she's also started transitioning. Between two oceans.



Video call x, 2022. Video and sound, 32 mins. (still)

*"My family and I communicate through a small mobile phone screen, and we are in two different Spaces to build a platform where we can show and disguise our different selves. It's like a carefully nurtured character in a Tamagotchi. During the years abroad I experienced different experiences and lost myself in places they did not know. Sometimes I want to ask the gods and ancestors if they still watch out for me and bless me. From youngest brother to youngest sister, from faggot to tranny, do you remember me?"*

Her video work *video call x*, is a collection of screen recordings between her and her family and friends. Her sisters.

This work is 32 minutes, with mostly no sound. The majority of the footage was recorded in the moment. There's one between me and her where I'm installing a show in Auckland and she's on the train in Wellington. There's one from her sister and brother in an airport, one with her sister and Yumoi as she's holding a big soft toy of a pink rabbit.

There is one video call in this work which was planned, a performance. It's of her and her sister at the beach. Yumoi in Lyall Bay, the beach next to the Wellington Airport, and her sister Taffy in Hainan, China. They both wear blue dresses. In both Wellington and Hainan, it's a sunny day and they're video calling on the beach.

She talked about wanting to talk to each other across the ocean. How dipping one's toes in the ocean can connect two people over thousands of kilometres. The water connects.

The ocean can connect in a similar way an internet connection does. I often think about how universally beautiful some things are which connect us. Everyone knows what it's like to see a sunset. Everyone has music which makes them feel good, their favourite dish.

Yumoi is obsessed with food. A really fundamental part of me and Yumoi's relationship was built through eating. She'd show me all these epic Chinese meals to eat at restaurants. Last Christmas she had a bunch of close friends over at her flat. She made an epic spread of food with the central piece being a roast duck. I remember this night being really special. We drank yummy cocktails, ate watermelon and danced to Earthshaker.



Yumoi posing with *God! Are you still watching me and blessing me?*

Yumoi's work *God! Are you still watching me and blessing me?* is a projection machine that projects a custom design she got made. Similar to the projections you'd see outside some restaurants in town that present the restaurant's name on the footpath. Kind of like a welcome mat, the light shines down in front of you as you walk into the establishment.

The text reads *Zhigang Eric Yuri Yumoi Newtown Poneke A Faggot A Tranny*

It's an artist bio, almost. A Welcome. A "hello, this is me". You've let me know who you are, who you've been. And in the centre it reads *God! Are you still watching me and blessing me?* A question is the centre. Is it a full moon? It's on the ground. It spins around. She lists every name she's gone by up until now.

The text is surrounded by a number of emojis. Devils, grinning. Trains, Angels, Chef girls, heart eye emojis and chickens sitting in their half cracked eggs. Little identifying stickers surrounding an ocean of Yumoi and in the centre is a roast duck.

The light in this context is almost sculptural. I don't want to walk over it. But it's fun to let it shine down on you. Be in the centre of the spiral. Is Yumoi calling me a duck, or is she the duck?

This show feels kinda crazy. There's a manic energy to it... a lot going on. *Sissy That Walk* by Rupaul playing, then it's Yumoi's sister calling her from the airport across the room, then you're staring in the eyes of a happy, then crying, then angry virtual girl with a butterfly stuck on her nonexistent nose. Is she just overwhelmed by the amount of idle butterflies glistening around her? Or is rapidly cycling emotions, a spiritual magnet for red and silver metallic butterflies?



*5G girl*, 2022. Video, 2mins. Stickers.

Back to the video again thumping you around the ocean, *Sophie's Faceshopping* playing for 10 seconds, stickers flying around, she wants to dye her hair red. It's impossible to stay still in here.

It's spinning me around.

Even as I sit here and write this I see the circle from *God! Are you still watching me and blessing me?* spinning around and it feels like I am moving and the ground is still. It's dizzying. Flowing with my sister's names, locations and identities. A tranny. A faggot. I feel like I'm on a wave on the ocean. I feel like Yumoi being thrashed by the waves. Being washed of all her body.

It reminds me of the story she told me where she was high on two tabs of acid in the ocean in Foxton. Being thrashed by the strong waves. The same strong waves I had been engulfed by as a child.



Yumoi in the ocean, Lyall Bay, Wellington. Shot by Angel C Fitzgerald. 2022

I think about portals a lot. I feel like this show opens a portal. I feel transported. Quite seriously around the universe. It feels like I'm being sent to my past, my future, my present all at once. I feel emotional. I feel sad, happy, mournful, excited.

I feel Yumoi in this space. *talk soon xxx* feels deeply personal to me. Like a love letter to her sisters. She's showing us her journey, her identity. Her spirituality, transition, families, sisters. Spaces from both ends and how we connect from two completely different sides of the world, perspectives and backgrounds. She's showing us new opportunities, new methods.

I feel blessed to have had the chance to have shared so much of my time with such a special person like Yumoi. I feel proud of her. My sister. <3 x



God! Are you still watching me and blessing me?