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photography

Weixin Chong (b. 1988, Singapore) uses subtle and refined imagery to delicately commentate on the human practice of archiving and recording history. Her newest series examines our obsession with concealing the aging process, especially in women.

Q. Tell us about how you incorporate theories of archiving into your work.

A. I think we're never fully aware of our predispositions and assumptions, and how this embedded subjectivity influences how we consider what is worth being archived. While making my plant series, *Exponential Taxonomies*, a lot of my research dealt with the motivations behind the construction of colonial natural history records—the drive to discover, collect, and attribute names to tropical plants and animals was a way of usurping the “exotic” as one's own, often competitively among European colonisers.

Q. What specific materials and theories did you use to create *Beige Dreams*?

A. I wanted to create a clear image and record of my floral subjects, so I printed the photographs on aluminum to embody their texture, bringing out the slick fluidity and moist flesh of the plants. I like how portraiture is monumental in a specific way, like the French painter Fantin-Latour's floral still-lives. I also wanted to reference high-end cosmetic advertisements, which were a big influence for this series.

Q. Your final pieces are the result of a creative process that includes research and extensive personal interaction with your subjects before you photograph them. How did this process manifest itself in the creation of *Beige Dreams*?

A. Creating *Beige Dreams* was my first time working with flowers, and the work draws on the personal history of my perception of flora as symbols and visual motifs. Flowers have long been symbols associated with girls and young women, and images of or containing flowers usually represent some sort of feminine youth. Additionally, in Chinese culture, prostitutes are euphemistically referred to as “flowers,” and in the Chinese period dramas I remember watching with my grandmother, the characters who were prostitutes often had names associated with flora. Leading up to the creation of *Beige Dreams*, I became acutely aware of the rate and process of decay that each plant went through, and how different kinds of cosmetics masked or affected this aging. The flesh of the flowers represents our own skin in a way, since the youth of both ourselves and flowers are fetishized.

A. With my past work, I often resisted or found ways around creating formal photographic images, instead using technology like scanners and mobile phones. This new work afforded me the opportunity to receive mentorship from photographer Julio Galeote, who helped me with making the final photographic images. This instruction and encouragement marked a turning point in my embracing the photographic medium, inspiring me to engage further with its capabilities.

Q. The title *Beige Dreams* is evocative and synaesthetic. Tell us about its different components and what they represent for you.

A. Using the colour beige was a reference to perceptions of skin tone and shades in the cosmetic and advertising industries that we are constantly surrounded by. Beige has always been an unsettling colour for me: I have memories from early childhood where the beige Crayon was a prized component of a colouring collection for being “people-coloured,” even in an ethnographically diverse school in Singapore. In terms of fashion, beige or “nude” colours gingerly tread between their perception as tacky or sophisticated. There’s this unspoken acceptance of beige as a symbol of the most neutral representation of a given entity. *Dreams* allude to desire’s aspirational components, but also to its darker undertones. Makeup and decoration both relate to a type of dream or desire that we are trying to reach.

Q. How does your work address *vanitas*, *duplicity*, and *decay*, and what you call “*blatant superficiality*”?

A. I love the chameleon potential of makeup and fashion, and how we encode ourselves through our appearance. *Blatant superficiality* often signals an awareness of this process, and I see it as our exercising agency and visible engagement with these cultural codes. My work captures some of that awareness, and also captures our own inevitable deterioration.

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