



REVIEW - 14 FEB 2018

‘The Moment Before Inexorable Collapse’: Jennifer Tee’s Space in Flux

Viewers of the artist's exhibition ‘Let It Come Down’ at Bonner Kunstverein, Germany, experience the curious inbetweenness of a limbo state

BY NOEMI SMOLIK

According to Jennifer Tee, the motto of her art is ‘soul in limbo’. This is the same answer given by the protagonist of André Breton’s novel *Nadja* (1928), when asked who she is: ‘Without a moment’s hesitation’, she proclaims, ‘I am the soul in limbo.’ Who knows what a soul is? What a space without limits might be? This latter question is central to Tee’s exhibition at Bonner Kunstverein, ‘Let It Come Down’, its catalogue of objects spread, laid, stood and hung. On the floor are four loosely hand-woven woollen ‘rugs’, or ‘Crystalline Floorpieces’ (2017), each interspersed with various glazed ceramics of indefinable form, and an island of snake-like terracotta objects. Two works, *Ether Plane~Material Plane* (2014) and *Subtle Planes~Spirit Matter* (2013), see lengths of bamboo balanced horizontally on thin ceramic bases. The tips of one are sheathed in

pyramid-like ceramic elements; the other is hung with what look like lemons; both are lit by suspended neon ring cuffs that bring to mind a state defined by Thomas Elsaesser as 'constructive instability'. Elsaesser coined the phrase in response to Peter Fischli and David Weiss's now-legendary film, *The Way Things Go* (1987), in which a lengthy chain reaction sees a series of balancing objects tip one another over. It is this same impression of short-lived balance (that familiar thought: 'Oh god, everything's about to come crashing down!') that keeps Tee's space in flux, allowing the viewer to experience the curious inbetweenness of a limbo state.



Jennifer Tee, 'Let It Come Down', installation view, Bonner Kunstverein, 2017. Courtesy: Bonner Kunstverein; photograph: Mareike Tocha

This moment before the inexorable collapse – referred to as beautiful by Fischli and Weiss because of its potential to hurl you out of controllable time and space – is reinforced by the series 'Tao Magic' (2017): a collection of coloured hemispheric ceramics that are spread across the walls like stars, evoking the cosmos. *Let It Come Down* (2017) is a collage of thousands of dried tulip petals sourced from the Netherlands, their ornamental structures alluding to a ship motif often featured in Indonesian textiles. The work's title, which is also that of the show, is taken from William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (1606), where it is uttered by an unnamed killer immediately before murdering Banquo; allusions to literature – particularly as a form of resistance – continue throughout the exhibition. *Resist Stack of Books* (2017) sees piles of books spread around the space, including texts by James Baldwin and the poet Maggie Nelson.



Jennifer Tee, 'Let It Come Down', installation view, Bonner Kunstverein, 2017. Courtesy: Bonner Kunstverein; photograph: Mareike Tocha

Much of the writing on Tee's practice cites the influence of occultism and spiritualism – schools of thought historically frowned upon in critical theory. Various texts mention the theosophist Helena Blavatsky and the artists Wassily Kandinsky and Hilma af Klint – to whom Tee herself often refers – as well as the artist's frequent engagement with East and Southeast Asian structures of thinking. In this way, Tee draws upon, processes and questions, amongst other things, her own heritage, which, as the press release notes, 'includes Dutch tulip farmers as well as Chinese-Indonesian émigrés'. In gathering together these disparate narratives, Tee goes against the notions of individualism and separation championed by Western modernism, which emphasize the autonomy of the artist and the supposed purposelessness of artworks; she instead stresses the importance of collective experience and the communal overcoming (or destruction) of boundaries. This is promoted further through a series of performances (developed in collaboration with choreographer Miri Lee, dancers David Kam and Céline HyunJin Barreau and the poet Jane Lewty) that are being staged within the exhibition for its duration. Here, then, we find a space readied for both precariousness and communality – for Elsaesser's 'constructive instability'. Here, we find a platform from which to let it all come down, together.

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Translated by Nicholas Grindell

Main image: Jennifer Tee, 'Let It Come Down', installation view, Bonner Kunstverein, 2017. Courtesy: Bonner Kunstverein; photograph: Mareike Tocha

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