

Small matters

Three local artists turn their gazes to the trivial details of everyday life with *In Details*. By **Edmund Lee**

Ivy Ma likes to take things slow. So slow, in fact, that she could spot the plants grow in Yasujiro Ozu's 1953 classic film, *Tokyo Story*. Taking three of these 'pillow shots' (the great Japanese director's signature cutaways from the story action to uninhabited rooms, here of the same door front at different points of the story) as the basis of her new works – a variety of black-and-white sketches and drawings currently on show at the three-artist exhibition *In Details* – Ma seizes the chance to substantiate her long-term desire to try her hand at still-life painting.

"Personally, I like still-life paintings a lot," says the artist, whose works are recognisable for their quiet and meditative quality. "I really like the works of Italian painter [Giorgio] Morandi, who insistently portrayed bottles and vases. I'm obsessed with this state of observing, of only doing one thing in your life." Which, only fittingly, coincides with the motto of Ma's close reading subject since last summer. "Ozu likened himself to a lifelong tofu maker, and nothing else," says Ma with relish. "I'd like to achieve the same focus when I create my own works."



Art



Wai-kit Lam finds meanings in unexpected – and often irrelevant – places. The photographer's fascination with languages, identities and the confusion that emerges from both stems from her extensive experience of living abroad. This feeling of "uncertainty", if you listen to Lam long enough, seems to be an apt description not only of her artworks, but her personal worldview as a whole. "I can't say that I'm really confused," the artist jokingly clarifies at one point, having already mentioned quite a few times that she *is*. "I mean, I can still survive alright."

Then again, Lam's intuitive gift for comparisons and contradictions may

just be one of the sources of wonder for her works. For her *Orientation* series, the artist took her inspirations from the names of four European underground stations that she came across while travelling, including Sentier (meaning 'track') in Paris, Ostkreuz ('East Cross') in Berlin, All Saints in London, and Sesto Rondò ('Sixth Roundabout') in Milan, before matching them with unrelated photographs and sounds to intriguing effects. "I'm not sure if I'm actually one of those 'autistic' people – they usually love the underground," Lam reflects, before correcting herself and bursting into laughter. "But then I love maps too, so maybe I'm not all that autistic." That much we can be sure.

Choi Yan-chi is not afraid of implicit meanings. Myriad of them belie the mischievous and colourful exterior of her installation pieces at the exhibition. "You need to look closer into my works," the soft-spoken founder of la Space echoes with the show title, *In Details*. "Otherwise, you'll be left clueless. I want people to look closer and see the messages behind."

The video *A Competition of Making Flowers*, Choi's earliest work at the exhibition, shows the making of folded paper fortune-tellers on a split screen of 16 boxes. As the artist alerts me to the fact, the papers used in the work are printed

with historic images of Hong Kong's July 1 marches on one side, and ordinary colour patterns on the other.

The flower-like shape of the paper fortune-tellers provides the platform for the artist's imagination to run wild. Speaking of the flower imagery of her series of artworks, she recalls Elpis, the young woman personifying hope in Greek mythology, who usually carries flowers in her hands. "I'm from the 1960s," Choi adds, chuckling. "I've once been a hippie – for a little while. During the student movements, we would often sing the song *Where Have All the Flowers Gone?*" Huh? "It's [performed] by American folk singer Joan Baez; have you *never* heard of it?"



In Details is at agnès b.'s Librairie Galerie until August 28.

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