

ming hsun yu:  
what it all boils down to

on view  
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studio 45  
213 troutman street  
brooklyn, new york

The title of Ming's first solo exhibition, what it all boils down to, pays homage to their love of metaphor. Ming believes metaphors, though reductive, display human attempts to make sense of the world by identifying one, simple structure. what it all boils down to consists of a series of thirteen drawings and paintings created in Ming's studio in Bushwick. Each composition depicts a writhing mass of bulbous, abstracted forms. Cast in harsh chiaroscuro, Ming's compositions seem to veer toward the cold fragmentation of Cubism, but their bloated, sumptuous curves code his figures with a soft sensuality that animates them in space as though they are sculpture. Neither animal nor human, man nor woman, body nor building, Ming's figures viscerally wrestle with the plight of being caught in between. Born with severe eczema, Ming has noted that the open wounds on their fingers caused by the chronic illness often make them "feel like a monster." And as a Taiwanese, queer, non-binary identifying first generation immigrant, Ming feels as though their identity is constantly in flux, morphing, shifting, metamorphosing. Perhaps Ming's works are metaphors in their own right, each capturing the pain and difficulty of trying to build a multi-layered self. What follows are their own thoughts about the exhibition.

— Cammie Lee

“Drawing helps me understand the world and my place in it. Every work begins unplanned, a collection of senseless marks leaning towards something. That’s the thing though, there’s meaning everywhere, and in everything a reflection.”

— Marlon Kroll

Figuring something out has been a constant challenge, especially at my age, at this very moment. Figuring out how to frame this show with an encompassing title. Figuring out how to co-exist with a chronic illness like eczema while going on dates and always being conscious of my fingers looking abnormal. Figuring out how to navigate Asian queerness in a foreign city that’s home but also not; how to fit into groups; how to stay in a good place; and how to embrace pain. I learned the grammar and most used vocabulary, and now I have to find out how to flirt in a second language. I learned a few basics about an instrument and now I have to make a song with it.

I used to take piano and violin classes growing up but stopped eventually. Although I’ve forgotten a lot, I still remember a few rudimentary things. Now and then, I like to sit in front of a piano, or pick up a guitar, and just start playing. Starting with hitting one note first, I let the rest of the notes follow naturally as if there is an invisible force directing which keys my fingers land on. It’s like dancing. When the music is hitting, my body starts reacting to it with one move, and then the rest just streams. I’m drawn to the rawness and amateurishness of these experiments. They feel awkward yet familiar. They are the words that get tangled up before my tongue when I speak English. It’s okay to be vulnerable.

I realized this is what I do a lot — starting something first and just letting the flow take over. It is even happening as I’m writing this right now. When I go into my studio on the weekends, I just start a new page in the sketchbook and leave one mark. Then another mark, and another, and soon, something slowly surfaces and embodies itself. I try to remember how to draw a white plaster ball from my early academic drawing classes. Then I apply it to the forms in front of me to give them volume. Some lighting and shading are inaccurate, but it’s okay. Brokenness has warmth. I like the challenge of making something out of nothingness, or rather, endless possibilities. Some pages end up better than others, but every page is a new adventure.

Theories in the arts are like rules, like sayings, but not laws. They are guidelines passed down from generation to generation because it has been working. They are general truths that prevail over time and guide our future against the strong wind and rain; truths that are essential beliefs, morals, and values that can spread across the universe. But the theories are not definite. It’s fun to ignore the rules and make up new ones, and it’s liberating to know only a few.

I’ve been working as a graphic designer since 2021. The practice is much like seeking truths.

Truths that are like flowers. Its graphic approach is simple yet complex. Its goal is to find the most symbolic and iconic truths. It has fundamental theories but allows for diversity. It uses graphic two-dimensional forms to provoke messages. Not every graphic is a truth, let alone one that is generally accepted. You have to dive in and swim in the sea of uncertainties and distill the right ones out of possibilities. It's rewarding when you find the truths that others agree with and most importantly the truths that solve problems.

“What does it all boil down to?” I asked myself looking at the selected pieces for the show. It's a perfect title — what it all boils down to. There are many answers, so my stove is still on and I'm still figuring it out.

— Ming Hsun Yu, April 3, 2024

Ming Hsun Yu (b. 1999 in Taipei, Taiwan) is a Brooklyn-based graphic designer, animator, and artist. They explore possibilities within structures, fluidity between dualities, and joyfulness at all times. Previously at Wkshps collaborating with arts + cultural people across the international landscape to create dynamic visual identities, motion graphics, websites, books, posters, and more.