



**RICE, A QUEER
YELLOW
FANTASY**

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INTRODUCTION

"It is an article of white liberal American faith today that Chinese men, at their best, are effeminate closet queens like Charlie Chan and, at their worst, are homosexual menaces like Fu Manchu." (xii)

– Jeffrey Chan (editor). *The Big Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Chinese American and Japanese American Literature.*

This text is an accompaniment towards a terminal creative project, *RICE, a queer yellow fantasy*, and describes the sociopolitical and cultural histories that my practice is engaged in. This paper traces the three years of research and production that has led up to this body of work, and connects my visual work to the fields of Asian American studies, queer theory, and contemporary art.

The text is structured in five parts, *RACIALIZED SUBJECT EMBODIED THROUGH OBJECT, RICED OUT, QUEER YELLOW FANTASY, PAINTING YELLOW, and PAINTING FIGURE*. I trace a line of thought starting from the construction of East Asian man as a racialized-gendered subject and connect it to how objects can structure an understanding of non-masculine male subjects. Additionally, I explore how young Asian American men in the late 1980's formed oppositional subcultures around the modification of Asian import cars, and how the potential failure of these oppositional subcultures can operate as a site of reparative reading. Woven throughout these historical and theoretical threads, I position my paintings alongside and in response to the narrative that the text proposes.

To understand the social project that *RICE, a queer yellow fantasy*, is working towards, it is necessary to understand to some degree, the position of non-man that Asian American men occupy in the Western imaginary. While *RICE* thinks about the many signifiers that are mapped onto the Asian American male body, be it the mysterious and wise sensei/sifu, kung fu guy¹ or the perpetual foreigner, the most specific strain of racialization that this work responds to is one that frames Asian American men as incompatible with masculinity. This incompatibility is exemplified through media depictions like William Hung's short lived musical career based on a performance of Ricky Martin's "She Bangs" on *American Idol*, Bobby Lee's sketch comedy roles on *MadTV*², and Gedde Wantanabe's role as Long Duk Dong in *Sixteen Candles*. This context of racialized emasculation formed the basis of my practice during the end of my first year in the MFA program. I was interested in how paintings could narrate the psychology of the racialized subject through representing the vulnerability of the body.

¹ ala Charles Yu's *Interior Chinatown*

² including outclassed high school wrestler in Season 7 Episode 9, famous newscaster Connie Cheung in Season 8 Episode 19, and bumbling North Korean scientist in Season 12 Episode 8



PEEK, Will Zeng, 52 x 52 inches. Oil on Canvas. 2021.

This vulnerability is perhaps most evident in *PEEK*, as the composition centers a jaundiced figure in white briefs set against a pink rose floral wallpaper. The figure—with his right-hand pressed against the wall, and his left-hand hovering over his thigh, adjacent to his crotch—looks into a slightly open door from which light emanates. Frozen in action, this composition builds tension through the unresolved ambiguity and intimacy of the bodily gesture and facial expression. The lit interior reveals truncated sections of a window with blinds, a dresser, and a pair of jeans. Through the composition's particular inclusions and exclusions, the painting explores the relationships between knowing and not knowing, pleasure and shame, and presence and absence.

PEEK taps into complicated representations of Asian American male sexuality as contradictorily excessive and lacking. The figure, somewhere between man and child, is painted in pallid yellows and awkward blocky shapes, bursting with the connotation of sexual desire that may never be fulfilled. The work conjures the reality of implicit racialized anxiety, while making explicit the historical castration of the Asian American

male subject. Understood through this lens, the intimate often fumbling quality of the painted gesture, especially in the floral wallpaper, takes on a tenderness that complicates the narrative of the castrated subject.



YOU DON'T DESERVE MY PLEASURE. Will Zeng. 32 x 24 inches. Oil and holographic vinyl on panel. 2021.

Another work in this series, *YOU DON'T DESERVE MY PLEASURE*, similarly explores the feminization and sexual deviance of Asian American men in the Western cultural imaginary. Just underneath a yellow-green-gold-orange holographic houndstooth pattern is a naked yellow-green figure of medium build, sitting on a brown chair, with his mouth ajar and his hand on his penis.

Historically the portrait has been used as a space for reflecting the sitter's, often ennobling, imagination of themselves. In contrast, *YOU DON'T DESERVE MY PLEASURE* locates its unflattering perspective from outside of itself by seeing oneself through a racist white society, not unlike what W.E.B. DuBois³ describes as double consciousness. In this composition, I connect the Asian American male figure, and specifically his sexuality, with the gross and unwanted, while also centering his subjectivity to reflect the complicated and often contradictory experience of living outside of whiteness.

Formally, the grotesque is depicted through both sensorial and optical strategies. The sensorial elements—like the naked butt on the sofa or the open mouth breathing in combination with optical elements like the harsh overhead lighting, ugly shades of

³ Du Bois et al., *The Souls of Black Folk*.

chartreuse, and the figure's compromising position— all communicate a general state of disgust. Yet at the same time, the surface is interrupted by the painting's presence as an object. The panel is edged with a bright blue hue and bears the painting's title, *YOU DON'T DESERVE MY PLEASURE*. Stenciled in lavender, the words direct attention to the frame as a site of reinterpretation. Rather than taking the rejection of Asian American masculinity as a stopping point, here, I use the text to reverse the excessiveness and assumed undesirability of the Asian American male sexuality. In its place, I empower the subject through their rejection of the terms of their emasculation.

YOU DON'T DESERVE MY PLEASURE challenges the racialization of Asian American masculinity not only through text, but also through the disruptions of representation of the subject by imprinting a holographic layer on the surface. Drawing from artist Stephanie Syjuco's exploration of dazzle camouflage⁴, a WWI military practice of painting naval ships complex geometric patterns in contrasting colors to confuse enemies on the ship's direction and speed, I employ this tactic to disrupt the violence of (mis)representation and allow for a more expansive narrative to emerge. The same things that make the figure gross— the nudity and sexuality— can read as tenderness, sympathy, and honesty. By making work that acknowledges how American forms of masculinity and Asian American men are placed at odds with one another, I discovered that I wanted my work to more directly address the problems with masculinity.

In *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America*, scholar David Eng explains that because Asian American men in American social contexts are read as non-masculine, and thus feminine or homosexual, when forming Asian American identity, we need to draw connections between women's studies and queer studies. My work, through an exploration of objects and their relationship to forming subjecthood, hopes to follow Eng's theoretical trajectory and seeks allyship with that which is outside of the American masculine. I posit that the relationship between objects and subjecthood offers an interesting lens through which to draw theoretical and political relationships between identities outside of white Western masculinity. The object, never neutral, carries with it the circumstances of its production, a time and place, and social, class, and racial signification.

RACIALIZED SUBJECT EMBODIED THROUGH OBJECT

“What follows then is not just a story about how we use people as things, or how things dictate our uses of them, but a drama involving a deeper, stranger, more intricate, and more ineffable fusion between thingness and personhood.”(420)

— Anne Anlin Cheng. *Ornamentalism*.

In *Ornamentalism*, scholar Anne Cheng uses cultural and historical analysis to describe how Asian and Asian American women living in American culture are racialized through a lens of style, aesthetics, and objects. This form of racialization is so deeply

⁴ “Cargo Cults | Stephanie Syjuco.”

established it disrupts the separation between subject and object, with Cheng stating that "...the crisis between persons and things has its origins in and remains haunted by the material, legal, and imaginative history of person made into things." (442) By mapping out this fuzzy theoretical territory between object and subject, Cheng articulates the ways in which people become objects and objects become people.

Drawing from Cheng's detailed unpacking of how material histories are intertwined with the production of race, I explore the ways in which the car becomes a vessel for fantasy, race, and gender through the affects it produces. My practice is interested in the material realities that the car presents by occupying a wholly unique position in the American psyche as an object of modernity, independence, consumption, masculinity, and social and physical mobility, while articulating both a private and a public space. I also look to trace the ways in which Asian American subjectivities might affirm, utilize, challenge, or queer the car.

RICED OUT

"By appropriating and exoticizing 'Asian' symbols such as 'Asian' (Japanese) cars, written Chinese characters, and 'Asian'-sounding names for import car crews—all of which I refer to as an assertion of Asianness—youth in the import scene create a unique Asian American cultural space." (3)

*—Soo-ah Kwon. *Autoexoticizing: Asian American youth and the import car scene.**



caption: "Every now and then you would run into a modded Toyota pick-up at a car show... this one had Axis Touring Cup wheels and the Street Weapon 'Drift' front bumper that I mentioned earlier..." Lee, Joey AKA Stickydiljoe. "Exclusive Content...The Import Car Show Scene from '99 – 2001..." . *Stickydiljoe*, published May 11, 2012. Accessed March 13, 2023. <https://stickydiljoe.com/2012/05/11/exclusive-content-the-import-car-show-scene-from-99-2001/>

In my paintings, I explore non-dominant forms of masculinity through Asian American import racing culture. Import racing culture, originating amongst young Asian American men in the late 80's in Southern California, refers to the practice of customizing imported Japanese cars for aesthetic or performance purposes. The import racing scene proved to be rich enough to serve as a subject for "Racer X", a 1998 feature by Kenneth Li in *VIBE* magazine, which served as the inspiration for the *Fast and Furious* cinematic universe.

In *Autoexocitizing*, sociologist Soo-ah Kwon describes the import scene as a uniquely Asian American space that defies the model minority myth. She cites that approximately ninety percent of import racing participants in the mid 90s were Asian American. This along with the use of Asian or Asian sounding names and the decision to specifically modify Japanese and Asian cars, helped define the import scene as Asian American. For me, this became an interesting site of study because rather than performing normative or white forms of car culture –i.e., the working class, 50's style, leather jacket hot rodding of James Dean or the moneyed car cultures of Lamborghinis and Ferraris in Monte Carlo– the import racing community emphasizes their own identity as Asian American.

Rice, or rice rocket, are racialized terms used by people both inside and outside the import racing community to describe a Japanese or Asian import car modified in bad taste⁵. The rice rocket is attributed qualities that are already associated with Asians in American contexts– small, efficient, but not particularly powerful– in ways that are designed to continue the exclusion of Asian Americans from masculinity. Used jokingly, lovingly, and derogatively, the rice rocket offers an interesting frame to disrupt normative masculinity because it simultaneously points towards a culture built around the traditionally masculine pursuit of cars while contradicting the model minority stereotype.

⁵ Taste in this case is relative to the person using the term. Taste while subjective is deeply informed by the cultural, social, and class background.



ACCELERATIONIST. Will Zeng. 21in x 62.5in, 21in x 62.5in. Oil and holographic vinyl on foam. 2022.

In *ACCELERATIONIST*, the words “WHEN THE RACEWAR BREAKS”, “THEY WONT ASK JAP OR CHINK”, are stenciled in metallic paint on the surface of two foam cut outs of a Toyota AE-86 facing opposite directions. The words “RACEWAR”, “JAP”, and “CHINK” are applied as pearlescent holographic surfaces. Drawing from Guytari Spivak’s concept of strategic essentialism⁶, in which minority groups provisionally assert a shared identity to achieve certain goals despite differences within the group, *ACCELERATIONIST* proposes a moment of potential pan-Asian solidarity in the wake of an imaginary race war. While the narrative that the paintings suggest sounds dark, the work thinks about very real and violent historical racial conflations of Japanese and Chinese Americans – such as during the second World War or in cities, like Detroit in the 80’s, during a financial downturn with the decline of the American auto industry. These paintings seek to honestly acknowledge the reality of (mis)racialization of Asian Americans, but to also offer the opportunity for intraracial alliance.

⁶ Spivak, “SUBALTERN STUDIES: DECONSTRUCTING HISTORIOGRAPHY.”



ACCELERATIONIST. Will Zeng. 21in x 62.5in, 21in x 62.5in. Oil and holographic vinyl on foam. 2022.

The graphic quality of the paintings and their stylized form juxtapose painful collective experience with the iridescent material, rendering the text both less visible and overexposed. The seductive surface carries a wink and a nod as if to say 🌈🎀🌈
 🌈🎀🌈*chink*🌈🎀🌈 instead of the much less funny CHINK. The disconnect between two ways of presenting the same word offers the possibility of a reparative usage⁷ that not only evokes the absurdity of how race functions in the West but point to an intraracial worldmaking based on support and solidarity.

QUEER YELLOW FANTASY

“Fantasy here represents not merely an object or genre but a screen for projecting cultural and political desires.” (18) – Leslie Bow. Racist Love.

Cynthia Wu draws the namesake of her book, *Sticky Rice: A Politics of Intra-racial Desire*, from the phrase *sticky rice*⁸ – a term of affection used within the gay Asian American community to describe gay Asian American men who prefer dating other Asian American men. Throughout the text she mines the canon of Asian American literature to find queer relationships and uses those relationships as spaces for intraracial healing. Though Wu warns the reader against imagining the sticky relationship as purely utopic – she spends much of the book describing how the sticky relationships reflect divisions within the Asian American community– she is ultimately

⁷ Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*.

⁸ Within the broad category of terms that use rice to broadly signify the Asiatic (e.g. rice queen, rice Christian, rice eater)

optimistic about how it functions as a form of internal worldmaking and resistance to dominant social forces, like capitalism, cultural erasure, and heteropatriarchy. Just as Wu marks out the sticky relationship as a rich territory to explore oneself in relation to one's chosen community, I look to understand the import scene in a similar way. The import scene, through its emphasis on centering Asian identity and intentional reworking of racialization of Asian American men, parallels much of the liberatory politics that Wu identifies in sticky relationships. While usually not explicitly gay, the import scene's intra-Asian male homosociality and positioning as an oppositional subculture opens itself up to have queerness and stickiness read into it. Admittedly, this is also where I begin to depart from the faithful sociologists and their diligent recordings and interpretations of real subcultures, and reveal myself to be a traitorous, romantic, and misappropriative artist.



AROUND THE CURVES. Will Zeng. 78in x 48 in. Oil on Canvas. 2022.

How can fashion, like the picture plane, act as a space for embedding signification? *AROUND THE CURVES* depicts a figure sitting on a shiny red car, wearing black and yellow Asics that reference Bruce Lee's yellow jumpsuit in the *Game of Death*. Another standing figure wears an anachronistic light blue silk outfit with white lace that directly references Thomas Gainsborough's *Blue Boy*. This painting, of a young boy in blue which was completed in 1770, has gone through a series of resignifications throughout

the 20th century byway of various media representations and has become a symbol of queerness because of the boy's perceived flamboyance. The outfit's presence in this context, draws a connection between the need for distinction and care that the figures in the import racing community have towards their cars and the need for distinction and care that the traditional dandy might have towards their clothing. In this context, the car, like the outfit, becomes a signifier of class and a means for self-fashioning. In this painting, I use composition as a tool to explore relationships and tenderness through the proximity of two figures. The figures' symbolic and literal closeness points to the forms of homosociality that develop within the real import racing community. In combination with the dandy clothing, they hint at a solidarity and a sticky homosexuality that contests dominant forms of masculinity.

In thinking about models for reparative masculinity, I look towards queer Asian American scholars like Nguyen Tan Hoang who in *A View from the Bottom: Asian American Masculinity and Sexual Representation* analyzes cinema, pornography, and other media portrayals of effeminacy in Asian American men to mark out the space for bottomhood as an ideology. The text draws from the original usage of the word bottom⁹ in gay communities, citing how this role is often pre-assigned to Asian American men. Nguyen expands this term to encompass alliances with Asian American masculine subjects that value softness, vulnerability, and pleasure seeking and those who cannot or chose not to align to their social role. He proposes a more capacious vision for Asian American masculinity that opens the door to what masculinity can look like and challenges the need for domination. In the same way that Nguyen accesses the openness and complexity that bottomhood offers, I work through the medium of painting and the subject of the import car to explore themes of tenderness and intraracial worldmaking.

⁹ Used to describe the person on the receiving end of anal penetrative sex



LIKE A CAR ON FULL TANK. Will Zeng. 41in x 66in. Oil on Canvas. 2023.

I am drawn to the use of toy cars as subject because of their reference to childhood and the set of associations that this diminutive form carries around play and imagination. A primarily blue painting, *LIKE A CAR ON FULL TANK*, depicts an intimate moment between two figures, a blue figure who we see from the behind wearing a tank top and a yellow figure on the right in his underwear. The blue figure ponderously holds the toy car on a diagonal that mirrors the representation of the car on the poster on the upper left of the painting. Within the logic of the painting, both representations allude to the car but are not the real thing, making the car an object of unrealized desire. This lack,

implied by the unfulfilled object, in combination with the petiteness of the toy car evokes a castrated subject. At the same time, the toyness of the car elicits a sense of wonder, contemplation, and openness. With the toy car in the composition, I attempt to capture both a powerlessness and an expansiveness that mirrors Nguyen's reworking of bottomhood.

This work also builds upon the visual motifs of work prior to the import cars, such as the yellow figure in *PEEK*. Like in previous work, the ambiguity and suggestion of a sexual encounter imbues the work with a sense of queerness.



Wingo in *Cars 2: The Video Game* - "<https://pixar.fandom.com/wiki/Wingo>"

"As an Asian American, can I racist love a geisha car?" (105) asks Leslie Bow, in her book *Racist Love, Asian Abstraction and the Pleasure of Fantasy*, where she analyzes the cultural representations of objects that become proxies for Asian bodies. In this context, Bow is referring to Okuni¹⁰, however I might ask the same question of Wingo¹¹. Bow partially answers this question through what Eve Oishi¹² describes as 'perverse spectatorship', the complicated set of identifications by queers and people of color. I might feel frustrated that Wingo, and by extension import racing culture, is presented as a minute long visual gag in *Cars* (2006), while also feeling joy in Wingo's

¹⁰ a Japanese geisha microcar character from *Cars 2* (2011)

¹¹, a side character in the original *Cars* (2006) based on a combination of the 1996 Toyota Supra, 2004 Acura RSX and a 1995 Mitsubishi Eclipse with the Japanese text, "インポート" translated as "import".

¹² Oishi, "Visual Perversions."

playful design or excitement to see import racing represented at all. Similarly, in an Art21 interview artist Kara Walker¹³ describes her relationship to Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* as a split identification in the simultaneous seductive romance of the epic storytelling while being outraged by becoming the subject of racial abstraction. The figure of the rice rocket occupies a similar position in my mind, where I both indulge in the aesthetic pleasure of a modified car while also struggling with the racialized emasculation. The framework that I am building negotiates this dichotomous feeling of split identification while disputing masculinity as the dominant system that assigns value.

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#26

thirdgen
Slowest Progress Ever

PROUD SUPPORTER

iTrader: (26)



Join Date: Oct 2007
Location: The coal ridden hills of Pennsylvania
Posts: 6,020
Total Cats: 305



Whatever happens we all better hear about!
I just hope that Mustang with the body kit doesn't look like this:





Miata Turbo Forum - Boost cars, acquire cats. "Turbo Miata vs Mustang GT?" Accessed May 31, 2023.
<https://www.miataturbo.net/general-miata-chat-9/turbo-miata-vs-mustang-gt-42508/>.

¹³Walker "The Melodrama of 'Gone with the Wind.'"



AZN'S

Little, yellow... different.

"The AZN." Accessed June 6, 2023. https://funnyjunk.com/funny_pictures/99404/The/.

Nobody: Asian guys in the 90s:



Asians
Never
Die.

"(2) Facebook." Accessed May 31, 2023. <https://www.facebook.com/AsiansNeverDie/photos/a.1504003506456886/1797606870429880/?type=3>.



STUNT. Will Zeng. 52in x 78in. Oil and Acrylic on Canvas. 2023

STUNT is a horizontal yellow painting that depicts four figures, two standing two crouching, posing together with a car to their left and right during the daytime. The figures' gaze in a confrontational manner towards the viewer. The composition references an image of four young Asian American men wearing mostly yellow posing for the camera in front of their riced out yellow Honda Accord and Ford Mustang. Dating back to at least a 2009 Miata Turbo forum where posters debate the merits of Miata versus a Mustang GT, most uses of the image found on the web are mocking as seen in an early 2010's era meme website that is unafraid of trafficking in racialization of Asian Americans as inherently other, or on Asian American centric Facebook meme pages.

For me there is something important in exploring the longevity of this image and how it both mocks the "tasteless" side of car modifications while lovingly referencing rice rockets as a culture. The image's potency lies in its utter sincerity and silliness, depicting yellow men dressed up in bright yellow outfits to drive bright yellow cars. The unabashed figures consciously reflect a kind of reimagining of being that is available when we are able to stand in the outskirts of traditional American masculinity. The young men understand that they are raced as yellow, that their spikey hair and headbands might look goofy, and that not everyone is going to take them or their cars seriously. They proudly choose to present the absurdities of their racial identification in a physical and digital public. These young men engage in a complex discourse of their own making –like Wu's writing on sticky rice relationships or Nguyen's conception of bottomhood– that centers their own ideas around who to form community with, what is fashionable, and what to care about. In visually citing this photograph in my work, I am

hoping to tap into the feeling of split identification and to take seriously the proposition that the photograph suggests, that these four young men with their cars are cool.



Thesis installation photograph from Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art. 2023.

PAINTING YELLOW

In an artist lecture, Rebecca Morris¹⁴ briefly mentions the pursuit of the ultimate red painting as context for the adjacent pursuit of the ultimate pink painting. Morris talks about pink, as gouge, as material for experimentation, as gendered, and as raw matter where blood meets the skin. (34:41- 39:04) Morris' deep experiential and cultural understanding of pink becomes a part of how the paintings operate.

Not unlike how Morris thinks about pink, my project thinks about yellow. My initial use of yellow was to depict figures by the color used to describe race and as a way to acknowledge the homogenization of widely disparate ethnicities and experiences. *Yellow* is similar to how *rice*, as a term, places Asian Americans as outside of understandings of a normative white American society while forming an intraracial community of shared lack. Thus, the color yellow becomes a site of formal and affective exploration. Yellow is filled with material idiosyncrasies. Yellow, even with opaque pigments like cadmium yellow, generally has a lower tinting strength. Mixing it with a small amount of another color quickly pushes it into the territory of secondary and tertiary colors. Adding black to yellow, instead of creating darker yellows, produces muddy shades of green. As a result, the process of using yellow as a defining color required a degree of nuance and intentionality.

In *DREAMS OF RICE ROCKET II*, the yellow in the window takes on a nostalgic quality, like aged parchment, while the yellow in the figure glows, reflecting the light from the outside. *LIKE A CAR ON FULL TANK* uses yellow in a similar way around the figure

¹⁴ Rebecca Morris. "Artist Talk" –Visiting Artist Lecture Series

but has a gentler quality. In contrast, the yellow in the sky of *STUNT* matches the bold and confrontational quality of its figures. Throughout each one of these works, yellow – through its many tints, shades, gradients, volume, surface qualities, and juxtapositions – becomes a space for producing experience.

The ways in which yellow operates in the work comes into contrast with how the other dominant primary color, blue, is utilized. While hue and value are generally thought of as separate, when working with pigments it becomes clear that most shades of blue – cobalt, ultramarine, prussian – are darker in value than cadmium yellow. The relative difference in the values of the two colors creates a way to push forward the figures – the yellow-orange or yellow-brown skin pushes itself forward on a blue background. *LIKE A CAR ON FULL TANK* presents a poster of a car with a matte finish while using a blue-on-blue color combination. The result is an object that occupies a lot of space in the composition yet is still able to maintain a sense of subtlety. In this way, I use color as a tool for revealing, obscuring, and relating different parts of the painting.

PAINTING FIGURE



Sadako crawling out of television. *Ring*. Directed by Hideo Nakata. Toho. 1998.

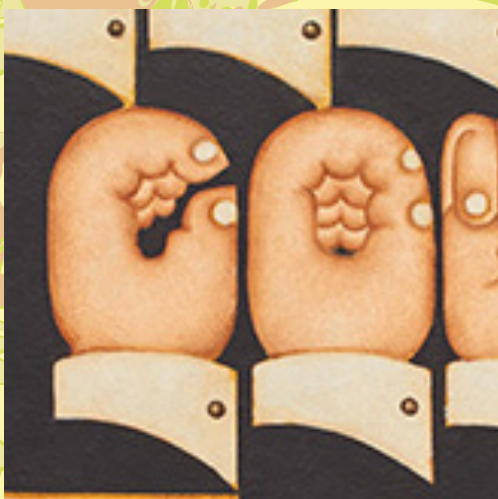
Hideo Nakata's *The Ring* (1998) follows a woman and her ex-husband as they investigate the origin of a cursed video tape that kills anyone who watches it after seven days. One of the most iconic scenes comes in the third act twist when the ex-husband, who thinks he is safe, witnesses the girl who cursed the video tape clawing her way out of the television to kill him. One reason why the image of this girl bursting out of the screen is so indelible is because ¹⁵ it disrupts the unidirectional relationship between viewer and viewed. The horror comes from the realization that every time a character was gazing into the screen, somebody in the screen was gazing back.

¹⁵ Or the Russian reversal, "In America, you watch television. In Soviet Russia, the television watches you"

The relationship between the observer and the observed becomes an important part of my paintings. In *STUNT*, the four figures appear tough and serious as they look directly at the viewer. The figure's confrontational stare breaks the surface of the painting by redirecting the gaze back out to the spectator and calling into the question the act of looking itself. Through this, I wanted to bring awareness to how the viewer evaluates these four Asian American men and Asian American men more broadly. At the same time, the painting reflects self-awareness in the mannered, self-fashioning stance of the figures. In contrast, the gaze in the other three works is decidedly indifferent to the viewer. When the figures stare off into the distance with ponderous expressions I emphasize this looking towards an absent object, to evoke themes of fantasy and loss, and to suggest a state of interiority. At the same time, the figures locate their own authority in their denial of the viewer.



(left) *Beggar with Duffle Coat (Philosopher)*. Édouard Manet. 73 7/8 × 43 1/4 in. Oil on Canvas. 1865/67. (right) *STUNT*. Will Zeng. Insert info. Oil on Canvas. 2023.



(left) *Brainwashing Cult Cons Top TV Stars*. Martin Wong. 30 x 40 in. Acrylic on Canvas. 1981. (right) *LIKEACARONAFULLTANK*. Will Zeng. 47 x 66 in. Oil on Canvas. 2023.



(left) *Painter's Hand*. Phillip Guston. 36 x 32 in. Oil on Canvas. 1979. (right) *AROUND THE CURVES*. Will Zeng. 78 x 48 in. Oil on Canvas. 2023.

All figure painting sits on a spectrum between fully clothed and nude, with a large proportion of clothed figures only revealing their faces and their hands. As such, the hands take on an important role in the expressive capacity of a figure. The following artists use the real estate of the hand to define a body's position, to complicate the dichotomy between language and image, and to signal the visceral.

The painter Édouard Manet is one such example whose painting style is characterized for its ability to elegantly convey visual information with sharp contrast and a small number of decisive brushstrokes. This holds true for his work *Beggar with a Duffle Coat (Philosopher)*, that largely inspired the upper left figure in *STUNT*. The hands, which takes up a small area, clearly articulate the gesture of a figure otherwise rendered in a mostly simplified coat and pants.

Martin Wong's particular use of the simplified hand gesture is a form of fingerspelling in American Sign Language. Wong situates his translation of hand into text onto the painted surface in the context of the three perfections of Chinese landscape scrolls, calligraphy, poetry, and painting. Just as Chinese landscape scrolls use the negative space in the sky to write poetry, so too does Wong with his fingerspelling. Wong's hands find another way of complicating the spectrum between text and image. His usage of ASL also references the formation of the disability rights movement that was particularly strong in the Bay Area where Wong grew up. I am interested in how the hand becomes simplified and repeated as an expressive sign. They reflect a particularity, a sense of comfort or lack of comfort, a reaching, a holding.

Phillip Guston painted squidgy hands. They point, push, hold, and bend. In works like *The Line*, the hand pierces through a cloud, pointing into the ground. The over-articulated veins split and web, evoking bolts of lightning. *Painter's Hand*, positioned similarly to the manicure, holds an object that evokes both the cigarette and the paintbrush between the index and ring finger. The hand directs our attention to the edge of the painting and beyond. Rendered pink and raw, the fingers become sausage-like phalluses, contradictorily both hard and soft. The hands are compositional elements that guide our attention but also an object unto itself that gets distilled and repeated.

CONCLUSION

My project *RICE, a queer yellow fantasy*, is interested in learning from and taking seriously the import car scene as a model for intraracial solidarity and alternative masculinities. While the import car scene is not an explicitly queer space and can be guilty of reproducing heteronormative gender performances, it does create its own unique set of values that center Asian Americanness and through its very presence challenges white American ideas around masculinity. Also, the car—loaded with signification around futurity, desire, and fantasy—offers itself as an object rich for utopic queering. The paintings, through its shared interest in how the object can become saturated with social signification, becomes a rich space to negotiate the contradictions of Asian American car culture and its possibilities. By combining motifs of my existing practice around the figure with the automobile, I look to contribute to the discourses of both Asian American studies and painting.

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