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Susan Lee-Chun: It's a pleasure (not) to meet you & Jillian Mayer: Day Off



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It's a pleasure (not) to meet you by Susan Lee-Chun and *Day Off* by Jillian Mayer are side-by-side solo exhibitions that channel and critique our material world through sculpture, video, and photography. I've followed both of these Miami-based artists for years. Never has their work felt more fresh or more relevant.

Lee-Chun pursues her interest in race and identity politics with a heightened sense of purpose. This time, she displays sculptures inside glass vitrines, transforming them into a collection of desirable objects. As viewers become window shoppers, the artist seems to feed the hunger of the consumer culture she critiques. Her brilliant soap figurines—knockoffs of Bruce Lee, complete with nunchucks—are as irresistible as the vintage stereotype of Asian masculinity they represent. Who doesn't adore the cheerful Kung Fu fighter? With similar guile, Lee-Chun invites us to love the ethnic slurs inscribed in the XXL bling things that she has cast in aluminum and enamel. A massive, gold four-finger ring intones "GIBBERISH." The words "La Chinita" flourish across a gilded hoop earring that could fit around my neck. Beautifully rendered, the work

embodies and exaggerates the Korean-born artist's personal and cultural signifiers. Lee-Chun glams up her social commentary and delivers it with a big wink.

Mayer shares her droll sensibilities in new video and photo works that play at dissolving the fragile membrane that separates the real from the imaginary in contemporary culture. Appropriating the latest trends in technology, she dives into other worlds while acting out in ours. Whether nude or clothed, she is inseparable from her clumsy virtual reality headset. Here, wearing only the headset, she lies meditating in a great green field. There, she's on the virtual lookout, perched atop a chain-link fence. Her summer frock and bare legs pay no heed to the snow that surrounds her. In the video *Day Off* displayed on a flat screen, Mayer falls, naked, out of a trashcan at the edge of a snowy street in a nondescript neighborhood. We watch her adjust her headgear, stand, and face a virtual onslaught of unseen forces. In what unfolds as a comical pantomime, she defends herself and narrowly escapes harm. Portraying a present tense that might portend our future, she communicates a notion that's at once nonsensical and unsettling. The idea that virtual realities might completely eclipse our experience of real life is not exactly impossible in this post-Internet universe.

Mayer's Slumpies, installed adjacent to her videos, make a compelling statement all their own. Acknowledging our attachment to handheld devices, the lumpy, life-size sculptures offer a real space where we can relax our digital posture. They invite us to lean over and fall into their clumsy embrace.

You might say that Lee-Chun and Mayer are clairvoyants. These clever artists reveal the invisible imaginaries that control our thoughts and actions almost every minute of almost every day in the twenty-first century. Making the oddest fashion statements ever, they feminize our blind and thoughtless urges. Lee-Chun suggests that no matter how much we seem to evolve, our behavior remains predictably biased. Mayer shows how technology reinforces our tendency to ignore realities we don't want to face. What, then, do we hope for?