



WORLDS AWAY

KEVIN CHIN

Bayside
Arts & Cultural
Centre



27 FEBRUARY – 24 APRIL 2016

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Imperium of Dreams

In Kevin Chin's paintings the phantasmagorical is unearthed. Whether it is strangers, his partner or himself depicted, it is as though his protagonists are all intertwined, engaged in an uncanny dance with not only nature but also earthly possessions. The purpose of this dance: to unravel the nature of reality and allow magic to intervene. It is a dance of self-dissolution, communion and bliss at the expense of time, sorrow and the minutiae of daily life.

Pleasure and wonderment punctuate the works in this solo exhibition *Worlds Away*. Here, we are invited into a mythic world where a compendium of narratives coalesces and a hypnotic reverie is invoked. Leisure activities including swinging, walking, rowing, and eating, showcase humanity at its most peaceful and least complex. People and objects curiously float, devoid of fixed boundaries. Humans undertake simple activities, abstracted from complicated lives. Across sweeping terrains, they are united within the artist's euphoria for colour and his deep reverence and joy for life.

Bliss is at the heart of *Airlift*, 2016. A haze of fog stretches across the image creating an air of mystery and otherworldliness and articulating Chin's interest in what is both seen and unseen. Disproportionately scaled domestic crockery composes nearly a quarter of the painting and yet it remains incidental to the central figure's joyous experience. The strewn bowls and chopping boards somehow manage to be absorbed into the rest of the landscape and are strangely not out of place. Combining disjointed imagery generates a cognitive dissonance that is powerfully arresting and indeed the signature style of Chin's oeuvre.

Structurally, the work is predicated by a series of strong lines, from the rope swing to the ladder, through to the poles and the post, which supports the weight of one of the brightly dressed young girls. But invisible lines — those being the trajectory of the subjects' gazes — enhance these strong compositional lines further. The young man looks up and across, whilst the two women seated on the bench look upwards. Meanwhile, the two girls look away from us, the viewer. This device of activating the work through the direction of the gaze, engenders a dynamic sense of intrigue, as though the image is but a very small piece of a much more involved scenario. These invisible lines also serve to create a sense of three-dimensionality to the work, fabricating a sense of immersion and suggesting the picture continues beyond the bounds of its edges. This is what makes Chin's work so captivating and engaging. We're always asking ourselves, what are the subjects looking at? What might be hidden from view?

Similarly, in Chin's diptych *Less Than White*, 2015, we experience the sense that we are closing in upon a much more expansive vista. The first panel depicts two children playing in the snow bathed in a soft and diffusive light. Although it appears to be the same landscape, strange objects, some resembling elongated pigs infiltrate the second panel. Could they be play equipment or public art? Could this be an alternative reality or is it the same space? Whatever the case, the curious relationship of the two panels provides a sense of tension and unrest. Intriguingly, there is a tranquillity and sense of the sublime marrying the two works. Together they invoke a harmony between humanity, nature and the other.



Kevin Chin, *Out to dry* 2015 (detail)
Oil on linen
137 x 198 cm
Private collection, Melbourne. Image courtesy of the artist, THIS IS NO FANTASY + Dianne Tanzer Gallery

Snow is also the trigger for activity in *Shovel Aside*, 2016. Lush foliage and a vegetable patch intersect with a forest scene where two workers are busy shovelling the fresh white powder. The washy fluidity of paint marks in the foreground contrast with the detailed rendering of the snow and greenery. A singular shovel overshadows their efforts. It stands poised, erect; its torn edges as though a collage, reference the artist's process of taking photographs (whilst artist in residence at Youkobo Art Space in Japan) and using it as source material for his paintings. Are these workers scooping up snow or are they digging into the fabric of painting itself? Are their actions self-referential to the artistic process? They seem unreservedly implicated in the stylistic carving and construction of the picture's surface. This methodology is also visible in the masterful *Grow Together*, 2016, where a young child tending the painting with a watering can produces part of the image's surface, a tree.

Chin is astutely aware of the weighty history of painting. Sometimes he overtly parodies it and other times he is purely ensconced with the medium for its superlative ability to convey beauty and illustrate a kaleidoscopic imagination. In *Via Swan*, 2015, it is the latter at work. Crowds enjoy swan-shaped paddleboats and rowboats. They travel within a divided and inverted landscape, each traversing a different path and yet somehow their individuality is obliterated. Within their merrymaking they appear to experience one and the same thing; it is a carnival of pure pleasure: innocent and buoyant.

Indulgence is also the subject for *Liftoff*, 2016. The sweet power of ice cream is the catalyst as a young girl clenches her face in both terror and awe whilst scooping into her mouth a heap of sugary softness. She floats between two worlds. Could the ice cream be inducing perception-altering effects or is the girl caught in a personal daydream? The blue and pink entangled tubes could be oversized straws or they could be transporters in between two realities — one a dreamscape and one real life.

Amongst these dreamscapes and blissful reveries, only one of the works points to perhaps a darker and more solemn mood, that being *Veils*, 2016. Three figures inhabit a mountainous landscape. One is hunched over under a scarf gripping their head; another awkwardly sits atop a pile of rubbish whilst another scratches their palm. Their gestures reveal a range of psychological states. Veiled so that their faces are only partially revealed, if at all, a sense of ambiguity penetrates this work. They are clearly in transit but to where? The rubbish and a street sign counterpoint the pristine environment of the mountain-scape. They are in a space of limbo, an in-between state.

A trek through mountainous terrain is also featured in *No Rest*, 2015. This is the most affecting of the works in this exhibition for it overtly references the act of dreaming—the life-blood of Chin's practice. Here we see the artist and his partner Clinton, hiking and camping through rocky and richly coloured terrain. Chin looks admiringly across to Clinton as he sleeps. Cuts into the picture plane reveal a heavenly light. Within the rock face, we see two different seasons intersect. Luxurious and ornate renderings of decorative flowers and leaves blanket the image; and there is an undeniable sense of wonderment at their psychological inversion.

Things are not quite as they seem in the world of Kevin Chin. He marries the banal with the fantastical. His is a mystical and transcendental discourse where inner states of tranquillity and equanimity are cultivated across all life forms including inanimate objects. It is a realm where dream states rule, a place we can only ponder whether or not it's truly *worlds away*.



Kevin CHIN, *Tub time* 2016

Oil on linen
137 x 97 cm

Courtesy of the artist, THIS IS NO FANTASY + Dianne Tanzer Gallery



Opening hours

Wednesday – Friday 11am – 5pm

Saturday & Sunday 1pm – 5pm

Venue

The Gallery @ Bayside Arts & Cultural Centre

Brighton Town Hall

Corner Carpenter & Wilson Streets

Brighton (Melway 67 F10)

Entrance on Wilson Street

Enquiries

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Above:

Kevin CHIN, *No rest* 2015 (detail)

Oil on linen

137 x 198 cm

Courtesy of the artist, THIS IS NO FANTASY +
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Front cover:

Kevin CHIN, *Liftoff* 2016 (detail)

Oil on linen

137 x 94 cm

Courtesy of the artist, THIS IS NO FANTASY +
Dianne Tanzer Gallery