



Jia Sung: Chaos, Whims, Lust

November 2 - December 15, 2019

Opening Reception: November 2, 6 -9pm

Chaos, Whims, Lust is an exhibition by artist Jia Sung that examines the role of the female trickster figure, replacing canonized patriarchal motifs in folklore with narratives of sisterhood, matriarchy, and rebellion. Comprised of over fifty figurative ink and gouache drawings accompanied by hand-written verse and prose poetry, the exhibition takes the form of a spatialized book that reads from right to left around the gallery space.

For *Chaos, Whims, Lust*, Sung toys with the ubiquitous character of the Trickster, a celebrated liminal figure in mythologies and folklore across cultures who takes on many faces and traits – idiocy and wisdom, detachment and devotion, wit and somberness – yet rarely rendered female. Instead, clever women in mythology are admonished. Often identified as witches, irreverent women are not seen as playful, but deadly and punished for their games. In this body of work, Sung calls into question the absence of the female trickster figure and emboldens representations of women in mythology by recasting male monks, disciples, and the trickster character of the Monkey King, into monstrous, hybridized femme creatures.

Chaos, Whims, Lust draws extensively from *Journey to the West*, a 16th century novel based on the account of the monk Xuanzang's journey from China to India obtain Buddhist scriptures, embellished with folkloric elements. The early chapters in the book detail the adventures of the character Monkey King which are imbued with patriarchal, Confucian underpinnings. Ideals of filial piety and purity are threaded throughout a story of male ascension to sainthood by way of shunning, maiming, and killing of women, who if not untouchable goddesses, are presented as temptresses and demons in disguise. In *Chaos, Whims, Lust*, Sung recasts women as collaborators, lovers, partners, chosen family, and observers instead of threats to be terminated. For example, Sung revises the episode in *Journey to the West* where a group of male pilgrims journey through the mythical Land of Women, changing it from a temptation scene into a strange, shamanic sisterhood. In the original narrative, the pilgrims enter a kingdom inhabited only by women, who drink from a certain spring when they wish to get pregnant and are inflamed with lust for the only men they've ever seen. Sung's depiction shows instead a comical male pregnancy, and hijinx ensue until they obtain water from the Abortion Stream.

The Monkey King folklore's central themes of defiance, rebellion, and punishment are especially potent when considered through the lens of gender and misogyny. With Sung's revision of this narrative that has deep and visceral roots for many, she asserts: if folklore, mythology, and fairy tales are the vessels through which we ingest the values of dominant culture, then retellings create a subversive space where women, queer people, the 'monstrous,' and the other can be celebrated instead of punished or shamed.

Organized by Alexis Wilkinson, Director of Exhibitions and Live Art. Exhibition and text support by Daniella Brito, Programs Assistant.

About the Artist

Jia Sung is an artist and educator, born in Minnesota, bred in Singapore, now based in Brooklyn, and received a BFA from RISD in 2015. She was a 2018-2019 Smack Mellon Studio Artist and Van Lier Fellow, and is currently an art director at Guernica and Teaching Artist in Residence at the Hudson River Museum. Her paintings and artist books have been exhibited across North America, including the RISD Museum, Wave Hill, EFA Project Space, Lincoln Center, Yale University, and MOMA PS1, and in publications including Hyperallergic, Jacobin Magazine, Asian American Writers Workshop, and The Guardian. She has taught workshops at organizations like the AC Institute, Abrons Arts Center, Children's Museum of the Arts, and Museum of Chinese in America.

About Knockdown Center

Knockdown Center gallery hours are Thursday and Friday from 2 PM to 6 PM, Saturday and Sunday from 2 PM to 7 PM. Knockdown Center is located at 52-19 Flushing Ave, Maspeth, NY 11378.

Featuring programming of diverse formats and media, Knockdown Center aims to create a radically cross-disciplinary environment. The particularity of our architectural environment and history leads us to gravitate toward projects that demonstrate a sensitive reactivity to site and environment.