

Digital Drawing Room: MFA Fine Arts featuring Ann Li

by Hannah Lamb-Vines



Ann Li

Starting May 10, you can view work by students in the MFA graduating class on the website 2021.CCAMFA.art and in the [Class of 2021 Showcase](#).

Works in this series were written by students in Glen Helfand and Maria Porges' respective graduate writing seminars this past fall and spring.



Bigface

No matter what her Instagram profile conveys, Ann Li is not Ceci. “She’s a ‘bad character’ because she plays so many roles. But we all play so many roles, just as people,” Li says of CC—like the common abbreviation for “carbon copy” used in email correspondence—the pink-haired persona with penchants for rebellion and exhibitionism that Li created as a way of processing the fallout of a manic episode. Her project pays homage to the fractured clarity of the bipolar experience through a combination of epistolary narrative, staged photography, and video performance.

“I need to understand myself as an artist outside of that [manic episode], too,” Li adds. She constructs her performances with an eye on the systems that operate around her persona and her audience.

For a satire of mukbang, she sculpts oversized sushi featuring her own body parts to “eat” on camera. Her use of the mukbang format is a clever illustration of the cannibalistic nature of performance-based platforms like Instagram, Youtube, and reality television. This seemingly innocuous genre of performance, wherein a YouTube personality eats a large quantity of food and addresses the audience, has led to massive popularity and profit for some creators. But the pressure to maintain such a performance can also lead to health problems, such as eating disorders.

Li acknowledges that as a performer she is culpable in the system that devalues pure vulnerability, and scrutinizes the origins of her performative impulse. “No part of my performance is not calculated,” she says.



Sushi Mukbang



Ouroboros II (不言)

As a first-generation Chinese American, she was raised within a duality of cultures. The realization that she had to code-switch or significantly alter her behaviors depending on the predominant culture of her setting was an early education in performance. Her adolescent experiences with the internet, a necessarily performative space, at times offered solace from the expectations that she perform according to her physical appearance and to the cultural implications that she is a Chinese-American. But she and the internet have aged out of their “prelapsarian” phases. Social media has become a permeative force for everyone who participates in it, a digital identity increasingly inseparable from the physical one. With her performance as CC, Li challenges that permeation, drawing a solid line between herself and her selfies.



I'm Green