

Neo Gracie
LEVEL 2, SAMOA HOUSE
283 KARANGAHAPE ROAD



LEI LEI KUNG
HOME FOR A BUNNY:
AUTUMNAL CITY
16.07-15.08.21



Port Mahon sculpture (1777–1782), Beauséjour Décure

This isn't the first time I've encountered these rabbits. My introduction to the 'bunny-arc' in Lei Lei's practice came in the form of a gift in 2018, as a plush keyring souvenir she carried in her luggage back from China. Having hopped all manner of logistical barriers, the bunnies in this show will soon embark on another international trip, traversing the trans-Tasman bubble from Melbourne to the artist's hometown in Auckland.

Since that first encounter a few years ago, Lei Lei's bunnies have bred and multiplied rapidly. In the studio and beyond, they appear in pairs: as paintings on canvas, on legs as stockings, on stage as a pair of large ears on a headband. During my visit to her studio, under a stopgap arrangement of heaters and dehumidifiers, 3 paintings lean against the wall. Two depict rabbits in the grass with a dirty black outline, and two are laden with still-wet plastered text. On a table I spot the debris from some trial-and-error resin miniatures, and a small box containing an impressive 3D replica of

a bedroom suspended in glass. A Little Golden Book on the desk reveals that the bunnies depicted here are lifted from the pages of a children's story from which the exhibition takes part of its name, re-read on canvas through a glossy monochrome filter.

Not included in this show, but also present during my visit, was an oversized paper-mache rabbit which loomed menacingly in the corner. The undeniable presence of this Miffy/Donnie-Darko hybrid was utterly deranged. Though its ears had capitulated to gravity under their own weight, the bunny surely inherited some of the same traits as its indestructible 91 million dollar stainless-steel cousin. Both are the offspring, perhaps, of a balloon rabbit progenitor.

‡

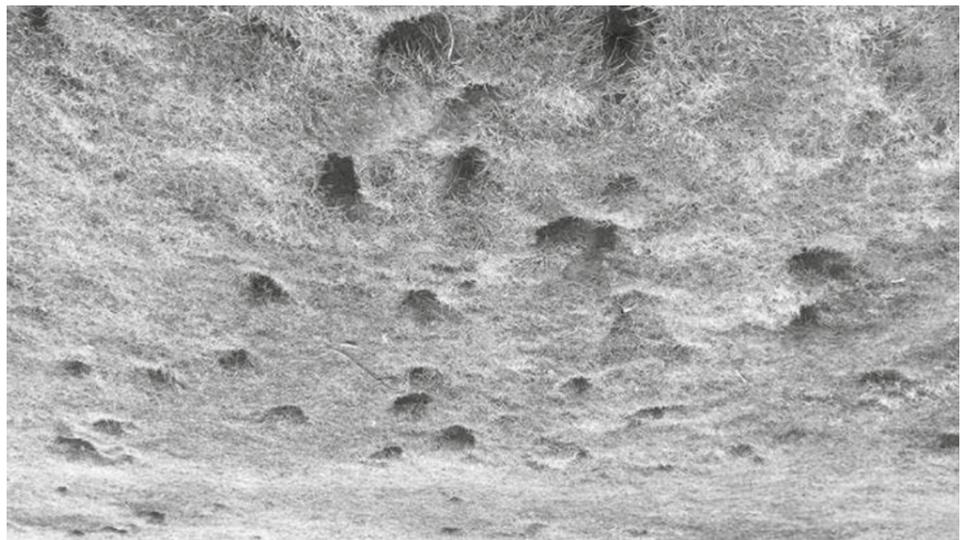
As far as I know, *Home For A Bunny: Autumnal City* is Lei Lei's first foray into what she calls 'real Painting', and what I'm told is the last in the bloodline of her bunny-re-

It is Calvino, a teller of tales, who carved a detailed replica of the Minorcan city of Port Mahon, where he was imprisoned for some time in the years prior. Constructed with incredible precision and entirely from memory, some of these miniatures are remarkably accurate, while others deviate significantly from their full-scale source material. Rather than attributing these inexactitudes to dim memories or dim lighting, one gets the sense that Décure's world-building might have been an attempt to process and give form to his past through a willful collision of memory and imagination.

LIAM VAUGHAN

Parallel worlds like these, real or imagined, have long been the fertile ground for the production of fantasy, imagined realities, and playful retellings of the world above ground.

Rabbit warren near Lake Dunstan, Otago



lated projects. A departure from the scattered ad hoc assemblages I'm used to seeing, these paintings in primary colours feel like an attempt by the artist to tackle a new discipline unencumbered, making sustained and deliberate use of otherwise idle time under lockdown. Like the rabbits and their multiple offspring, one might detect the inheritance of some aesthetic DNA in these images. The sections of bare canvas, the dry-brushed black paint and thick application of mucky plastered text borrow from a debased New York aesthetic that resonates on the walls and floors of grimy suburban galleries and art schools in Melbourne.

But we might detect something else also—a half-told fantasy story with a whimsical and sometimes otherworldly undertone. With the picture book in mind, one could regard this show as part of an ongoing experiment in the art of storytelling: the appropriated text can read both like a film script or confessional diary entry; the empty resin chairs might resemble the silent after-hours of a casting agency, stage set, or abandoned rooftop patio. The playful adaptation of readymade text, selected for their eccentric ruminations on love, attraction, and home is part of a methodology I suspect has an almost therapeutic function for the artist, reassembling life's real events into a kaleidoscopic fairytale or magical realist drama.

‡

To trace this narrative feature of Lei Lei's practice is to follow the white rabbit home into its spiralling underground warren. A glance at her work here may reveal only a brief array of apparently disconnected entry points, but beneath the surface exists a labyrinthine exploration of another world built on fantasy, memories, romance, jokes, and dreams. In the fabric of this parallel universe, identities are refracted and repeated

‡

Between 1777 and 1782, quarryman and crypto-sculptor Beauséjour Décure laboured secretly during his off-work hours in the depths of a hidden niche of the Parisian catacombs. In the hollow spaces left

Lei Lei Kung
Home for a Bunny: Autumnal City
16.07 – 15.08.21

Neo Gracie
Level 2, Samoa House
283 Karangahape Road

LEI LEI KUNG HOME FOR A BUNNY? SUMMER CITY

NOTES ON circles

1.

The circle has been known since before the beginning of recorded history.

We can observe natural circles in many ways, such as the Moon, the Sun, or in the cross-section of a plant stem.

Rotational symmetry is a condition I find useful for organising words, and so I keep the circle as a means of giving form to thought.

For example, I picture a ripple in water, where a force or movement causes concentric circles in the water's surface. As the circumference of a ripple dilates, energy becomes shared.

I use this as a point of departure to suppose that a text is a floating form, which is to say, I question language while simultaneously holding onto it.

2.

I use geometric abstraction as a way of confronting and making visible the limits of language.

It is a helpful process in constructing some kind of understanding out of an inability to engage directly with language as a material 'thing'.

Language has a tendency to disorientate us, despite it being a mutual ground.

I spend time with a word or an experience, in order to find my symmetry in relation to it.

My experiences accumulate, one after another, and then I redistribute them as information.

Then, a feeling becomes a collective event.

3.

I want to find a language for conditions that are shared, so that they belong to each of us individually but are not entirely ours.

I picture a ripple, otherwise known as a capillary wave, traveling along the surface boundary of water.

Light illuminates the water, indicating a soft rhythm that corresponds to my experience.

There is someone standing in my line of symmetry, and so I tell them to look at the water with me.

The ripple becomes a kind of shared state between us that is not geographical but expansive—a frontier for understanding one another.